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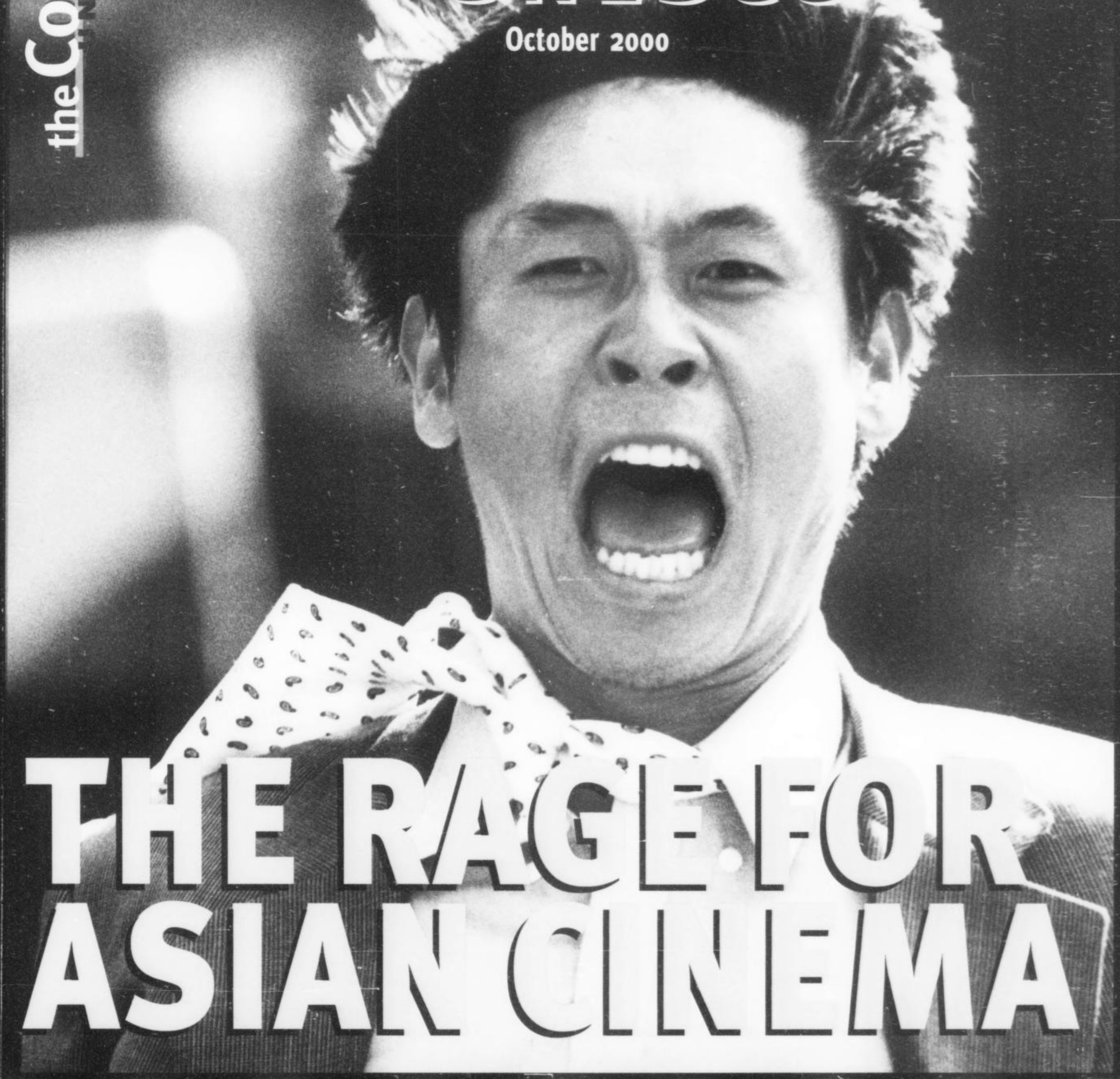

THE RAGE FOR ASIAN CINEMA

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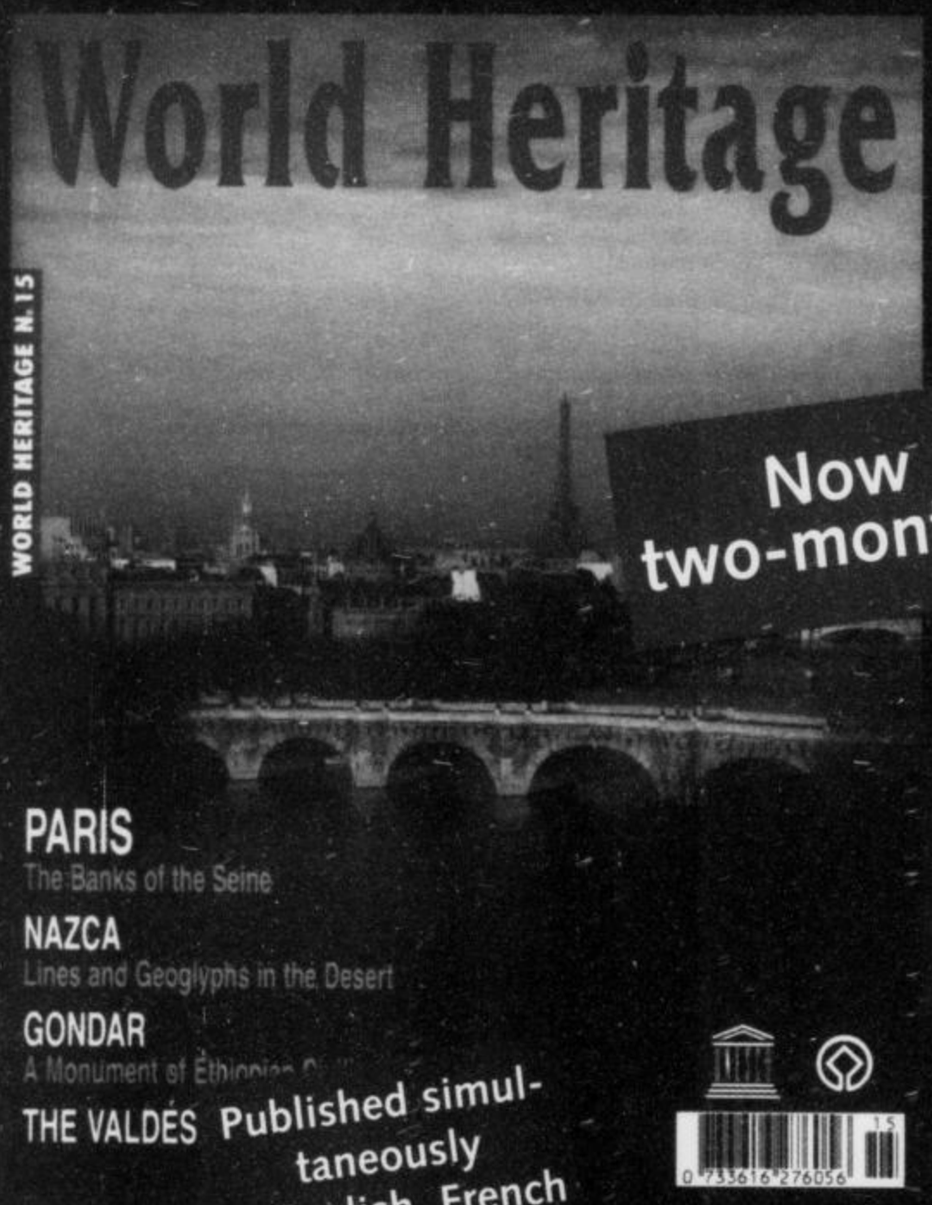

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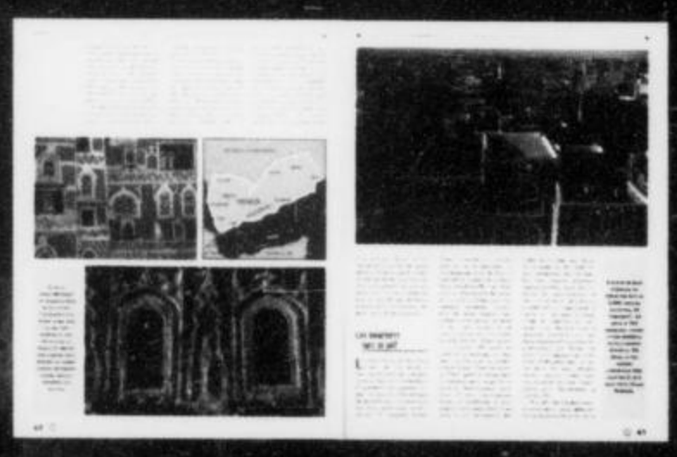

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© East Film, Seoul

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Shooting

The fly-past

the Breeze

**PHOTOS BY THE BALALAIKA WORKSHOP,
TEXT BY SOPHIE BOUKHARI**

PHOTOS BY JAMEL BÉRIBÈCHE, MORAD BOUKHEMERRA, SAMIA CHIBOUT, JOËL DIORFLAR, MESTÛRE GÜLER, NADYA KREITE.
SOPHIE BOUKHARI IS A *UNESCO COURIER* JOURNALIST.

Cub photographers from immigrant backgrounds take an unusually candid look at their troubled neighbourhood on the outskirts of the French city of Mulhouse

© Joël Diorflar, Bourtzwiller - Mulhouse

"You gotta be niii-ce to the reporter!" says 19-year-old Romain, who likes to make his friends laugh. And he knows all about what behind a good image.

He and all the enthused amateur photographers at the Balalaika workshop in the suburb of Bourtzwiller, outside Mulhouse (see box p. 8), are ready, even eager to answer "the reporter's" questions. They seem happy to talk, to be listened to, to show off their work. They're pleased to be known and appreciated.

About 40 per cent of this suburb's 15,000 inhabitants vote for the extreme right-wing National Front and these youngsters, mostly of North African origin, voice in words the very things they strive to show in their pictures.

"They have a quiet attitude to life," says Eric Vazzoler, the photographer who runs the workshop. "They rarely take pictures of burnt-out cars." The youths insist photography hasn't "saved" them from a so-called "sordid universe," as some articles have claimed. But everyone has found something in it to match their needs. It has given them pleasure and self-confidence, and they have stopped being afraid of what other people think. It has also opened up a new social and cultural horizon, a new world of imagination.

Like many youths, those in Mulhouse are anxious to meet people and have new experiences. But they are also hesitant, torn between family ties and the call of the outside world, between love of photography, which requires devotion and time, and love itself, which takes them elsewhere. Here is a sample of their thoughts.

Samir, 16, training in car maintenance:

"I've been taking photos for two years now. I take pictures of everything—of my family and especially my friends. It's pure pleasure. Once you've done photography yourself, you don't see other people's photos in the same way any more. You look at them more carefully and search for a message." ▶

***"I take pictures of everything—
of my family and especially my friends.
It's pure pleasure."***

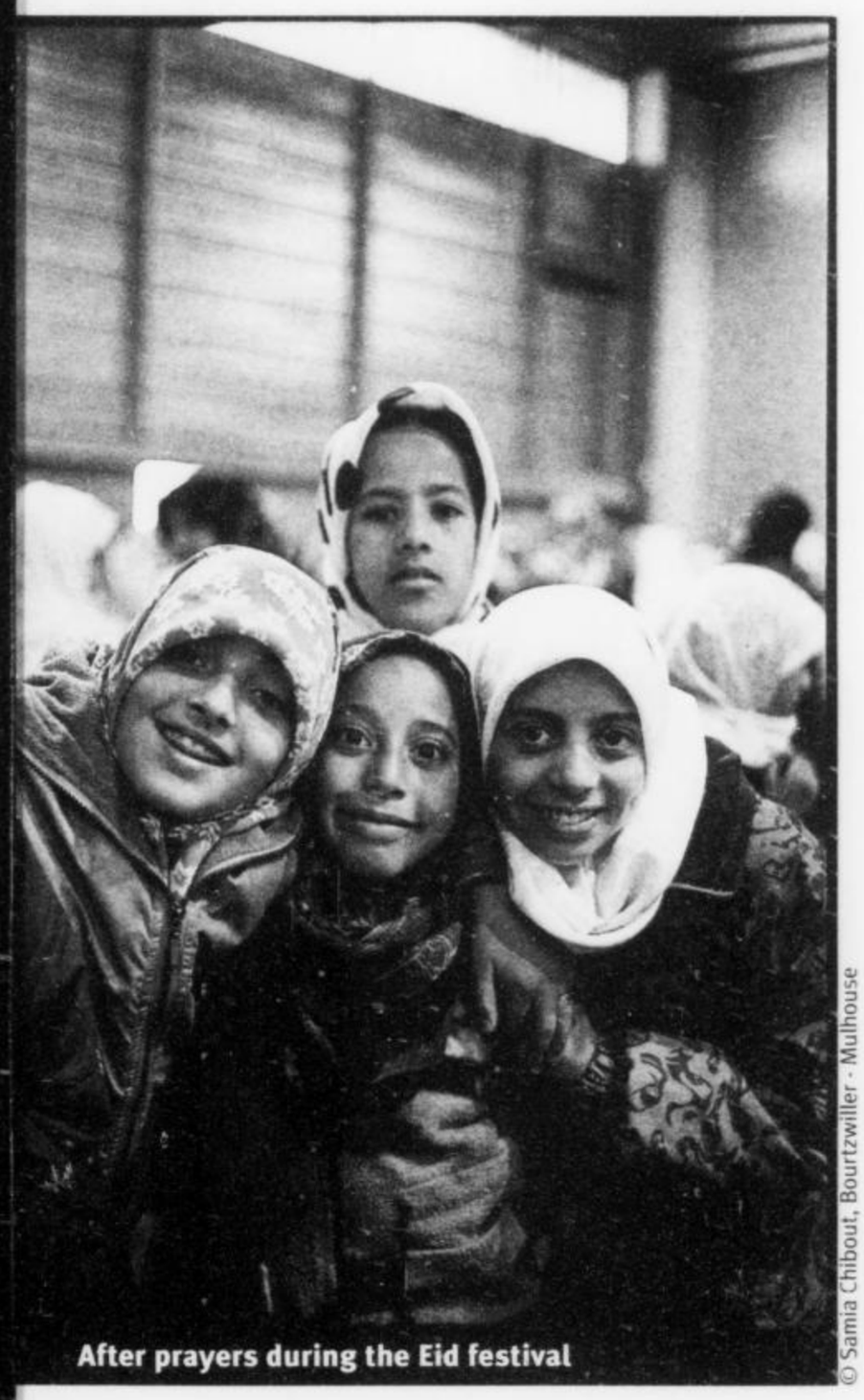
Shooting the Breeze

Who minds anyway?

© Mestüre Güler, Bourtzwiller - Mulhouse

Rap group La Baze in concert

© Morad Boukhemerra, Bourtzwiller - Mulhouse



After prayers during the Eid festival

© Samia Chibout, Bourtzwiller - Mulhouse

Samia, 22, studying management:

"With Eric, we do printing and developing. You've got to be serious and learn how to do it. We've seen how we can do it all ourselves and on top of that our work's getting recognized.

The articles they've written about us say that 'thanks to photography, they've got themselves out of a rut.' That's not true. Anyone can come to the workshop but not everybody does. You don't need to be saved just because you live in a poor neighbourhood. One paper said burnt-out cars were part of our daily lives, but that's not true either. They're interested in us because we live in a place like this. People say: 'Look at where they come from and yet they still manage to take photos.' Or else it's: 'That's how those neighbourhoods are!' So they're either trying to see through our eyes or else they think we've been saved.

Through taking photos I've made new friends. Before, I would never have gone to an exhibition. Nowadays, I walk in, look and talk with people from different social backgrounds.

Once a photographer rang me from Germany to buy one of my pictures. I was proud. My parents were too and told everyone about it. Eventually I'd like to have my own photo lab if I have the money. But I don't want to be a professional photographer. It's too hard."

Nagi, 26, works with a maintenance company:

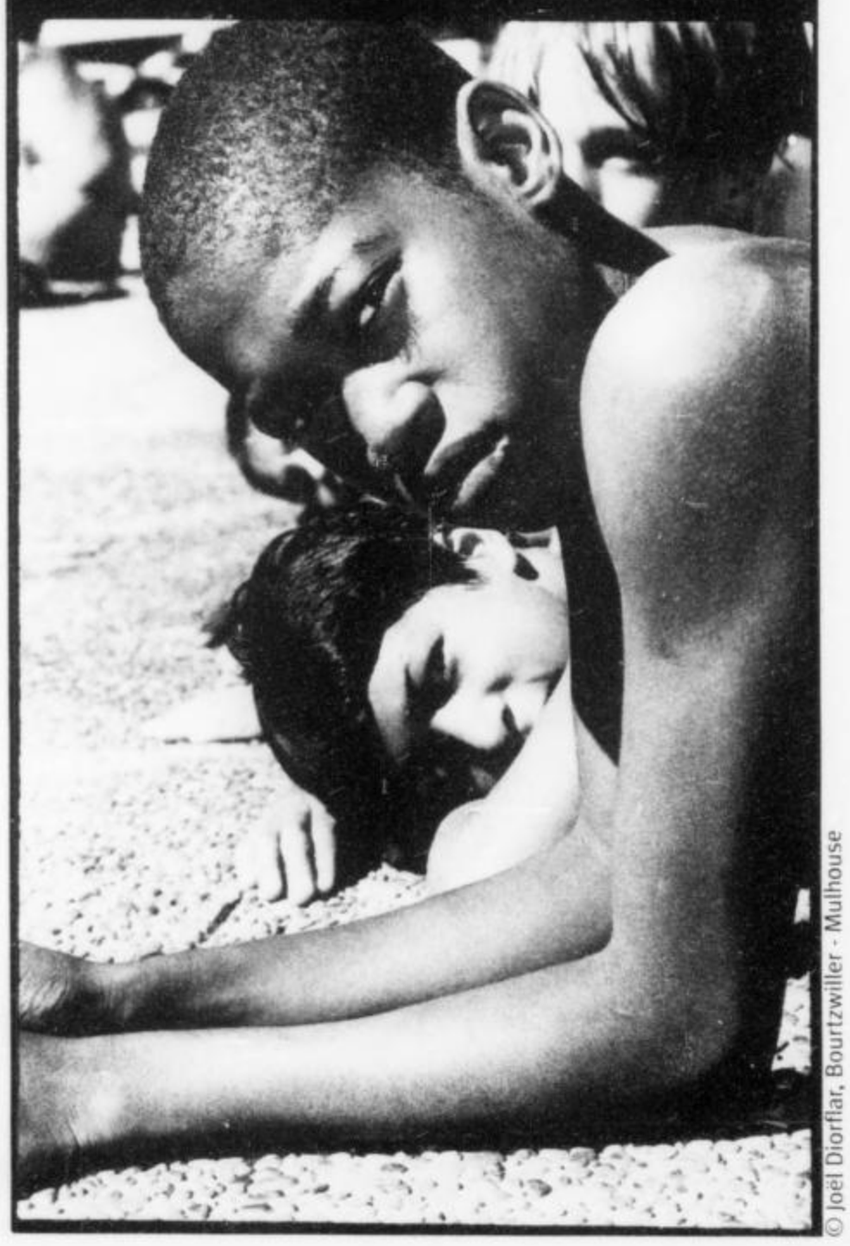
"I came here from Tunisia four years ago and I didn't have any friends. I'd already done a little photography in Tunisia, and I kept it up. It's helped me to find out how people live here and to meet people. I like the atmosphere of the photo lab even though there are some tricky moments with Eric. Sometimes I don't like what he says. But it's taught me I have my faults, that I'm stubborn." ▶

"You don't need to be saved just because you live in a poor neighbourhood."

Shooting the Breeze

© Jamel Béribèche, Bourtzwiller - Mulhouse

Neighbourhood games



© Joël Diorflar, Bourtzwiller - Mulhouse

Three colours

Kamel, 19, training to service machinery and computers:

"I've loved everything to do with pictures since I was little, when I dreamt of being a film producer. The photo workshop has been a godsend. Especially when I found out it only cost $5 a year to join.

Photography's classy. When you do it, you meet different people, from other social classes. The lab is also fun. We have a really good time there. Before, when I looked at a photo, it didn't mean anything to me. Now I know how to criticize my own photos and other people's. I've learned how to defend my perspective and my work. We don't get much chance to exhibit what we do, but we can help to change the image of young people.

When I tell people I take pictures, everyone's amazed. Hip-hop is seen as normal, but photography surprises people. They think this must be a good guy and they're less afraid of me.

Once, I was stopped going into a nightclub. My face must not be the right shade of colour. I got out my camera and as soon as they saw I'd come to take pictures for free, they opened the door. Another time, I worked for someone who did body-painting. I was paid for it and I felt recognized.

As soon as there's a project, I'm interested. I can see myself doing it for a living but not as a photo-journalist or a portrait photographer. I'd like to be an artistic photographer. You're freer. My goal is to develop my own style and make a name for myself."

Sandrine, 18, training in commercial management:

"At last I have a passion. Before, I wasn't doing much of anything. I was pretty self-absorbed. Now I have friends. The hardest part is to accept the criticism of Eric and the others, because I'm personally attached to the photos I take. For a while, I even stopped taking them. Then I started again. I got a bit of self-confidence."

Jamel, 24, studying at the Mulhouse art school:

"I'm the one who does all the graffiti art in the neighbourhood. I go by the name 'Serio' because S, E and R are the letters I draw best and also because they remind me of the word 'serious.' I started out wanting to study music but the equipment's expensive. So I got into painting. I'll need photography at least until the end of my time at art school. I'm interested in images. I think about them all the time. ■

Balalaika's Photographers

One day, art photographer Eric Vazzoler decided that he'd had enough traipsing around Paris trying to sell his work, mainly about the former Soviet Union. So he agreed to take charge of a "neighbourhood cultural project" in the northern suburb of Mulhouse, in eastern France, and not surprisingly, gave his workshop a Russian name. Projects like these were started by the Ministry of Culture in 1996 to try to "reduce social divisions."

"I was going to stay seven months, but I've been here nearly four years now," says Eric, 37. He's about to move on, but his project has lasted longer than all the others and been much praised. There have been exhibitions in France and other countries, generous press coverage and a book soon to be published.

The youngsters credit Eric with its success. "He isn't easy and he's demanding to work with, but what a pro!" they say. "We can always knock on his door at 11 o'clock at night to get a roll of film."

Eric, who lives in the neighbourhood, is more modest. "When I arrived here, there was nothing. I filled a gap, and I have the cream of the crop. The really disturbed kids can't take the studious atmosphere of the lab." And in his gruff but kindly way, he adds: "Their pictures are very nicely composed. They've got a distinct style. They're refreshing and generous. At their age I was busy copying the great masters. These kids aren't influenced by anyone." Except by Eric, of course. ■

Taking a shower

© Joël Diorflar, Bourtzwiller - Mulhouse

My brother reads the Koran

© Nadya Kreite, Bourtzwiller - Mulhouse

Chernobyl: the political fall-out continues

Just how bad was the world's worst nuclear disaster? The answer lies hidden within a web of politics and scientific uncertainty enmeshing the UN and eastern European governments

FRED PEARCE

ENVIRONMENTAL JOURNALIST AND CONSULTANT FOR THE BRITISH WEEKLY MAGAZINE, *THE NEW SCIENTIST*

After the explosion, 50,000 "liquidators" were sent onto the roof of the reactor to "clean up"

A sigh of relief ripples across Europe as engineers prepare to shut down Chernobyl, the world's most feared nuclear power plant, on December 15th. Politicians have finally brokered a deal in which Western donors foot the bill of about two billion dollars to close and fully entomb the Ukrainian reactors. Yet for many ordinary citizens, the nightmare continues.

Just a few months ago, on April 26th, thousands marched solemnly through the towns of Belarus, Ukraine and eastern Russia to commemorate the dead from the nuclear disaster 14 years before. At 1:26 am bells tolled to mark the moment when a Chernobyl reactor blew and a deadly radioactive fall-out began to blanket their fields and towns.

But as well as mourning, there was fear. Fear of the continuing radiation, which could claim thousands more. And fear of speaking out of turn. That night, Yuri Bandazhevsky, rector of the Gomel Medical Institute in Belarus until his arrest last year, was in forced internal exile in the capital of Minsk. He is one of many researchers who say their work has been suppressed or ignored by governments anxious to play down the radiation risks their citizens still face.

Estimates of the death toll to date range from the 32 offered by UN nuclear scientists to the 15,000 suggested by some Ukrainian researchers. In June, scientists at the UN's Scientific Committee on the Effects of Atomic Radiation (UNSCEAR) reported that "there is no evidence of a major public health impact attributable to radiation, apart from a high level of thyroid cancer in children [from which] few should die." Yet the previous day the UN Secretary-General, Kofi Annan, appeared to disagree when he said: "The catastrophe is far from over. It continues to have a devastating effect not only on the health of the people, but on every aspect of society." So what is the truth? And how do these disparities arise?

The accident at the Chernobyl nuclear

power plant reduced the Number Four reactor to an inferno spewing out a radioactive cloud for ten days. It released a hundred times more radioactivity than the atomic bombs at Hiroshima and Nagasaki combined. For several days there was total silence, before the panic evacuation of some 116,000 people from an exclusion zone that stretched up to 30 kilometres from the plant.

Only years after the accident did the public learn that a larger zone some 150 kilometres away near the Belarus town of Gomel and extending into Russia suffered heavy fall-out in rain shortly after the accident. It emerged in 1989 that a fifth of Belarus had been significantly contaminated. Some 400,000 people were resettled. And today around four million people still live in areas with some acknowledged contamination.

Official secrecy inside the Soviet Union and its successor governments about the extent of the contamination continues to bedevil the task of keeping people safe, says Greenpeace's Chernobyl specialist Tobias Muenchmeyer. Researchers inside the affected countries agree. "A regime of secrecy was accepted in our country from the very first second the catastrophe happened," says Vladimir Chernousenko, the Ukrainian scientist who co-ordinated the post-accident clean-up.

A partial information blackout by governments, combined with scientific caution, has helped lead UN agencies into seriously underestimating the death toll, Muenchmeyer believes. Critics of the nuclear industry such as Rosalie Bertell, president of the International Institute of Concern for Public Health in Toronto, say there is another political reason. They point to a 1959 agreement between the International Atomic Energy Agency and the World Health Organization, which said that "the IAEA had the primary responsibility for encouraging, assisting and co-ordinating research on, and the development and practical application of atomic energy." According to Bertell, "the IAEA has since considered itself to be the watchdog over information about radiation health effects which is distributed to the public." Bertell and other organizations this year called for the WHO to amend the agreement.

The most important radioactive isotopes released at Chernobyl were iodine and caesium. Iodine-131 has a half-life (the time it takes for half the atoms of a radioactive isotope to decay) of eight days. It was mostly inhaled and eaten in contaminated food. Caesium-137 has a half-life of some 30 years. It is still present in soils and vegetation and continues to contaminate people through foodstuff. Some lesser isotopes have half-lives of hundreds or even thousands of years.

the surface.

© Igor Kostin/Imago/Sygma, Paris

Controversy over the casualty list

Who suffered? In the front line were the "liquidators"—the estimated 600,000 to 800,000 soldiers and public employees drafted in to make the reactor safe and bury contaminated waste. Some 50,000 of them worked on top of the reactor. "They were supposed to stay on the roof to fight the fire for only 90 seconds, then be replaced. One can easily guess this did not happen," says Jean-Pierre Revel, senior health official at the International Federation of the Red Cross. As a result, 237 liquidators were hospitalized; 32 died.

But since then, the Soviet Union and its successors have been unable or unwilling to keep track of this most-at-risk group. According to Leonid Ilyin, a former Russian member of the International Commission on Radiological Protection, "none of these men was registered by name. None was checked [for subsequent health] on a regular basis. They all went back to their homes." This failure is probably the largest organizational cause of the disputes over Chernobyl's death toll. Last April, Viacheslav Grishin, president of the Chernobyl League—a Kiev-based organization that claims to represent the liquidators—said 15,000 liquidators had died and 50,000 were handicapped. His source was a controversial estimate by Chernousenko, based on likely cancer rates from radiation doses that he believes the liquidators received.

Cancers have been the biggest long-term medical fear. By 1991, doctors were reporting many cases of thyroid cancer among children under four at the time of the disaster. In 1992, a group of Western researchers, including Keith Baverstock of the WHO, agreed that Chernobyl was the likely cause. Yet it was only in 1995, after some 800 cases had emerged, that the UN system formally accepted the ▶

Lethally close to Chernobyl, the abandoned city of Pripiat in Ukraine.

finding. This delay had serious implications in finding and treating the disease, which is not fatal if caught early enough.

Playing politics and crushing dissent

The conclusion had been initially controversial partly because the evidence from Hiroshima and Nagasaki suggested that there should be far fewer cases. But politics also entered the equation. The *Economist* magazine speculated that "if the health risks have been underestimated or understated, the American government could face new lawsuits on everything from the Nevada [nuclear] tests to the Three Mile Island nuclear accident in 1979."

At any rate, there are now some 1,800 recorded cases of thyroid cancer attributed to Chernobyl. In the most contaminated districts, such as Gomel, childhood rates are 200 times those in western Europe. Estimates of the total number of cases expected to arise in the future range from a "few thousand," suggested by the IAEA, to the 66,000 predicted for a single group—Belarusian children under four at the time of the disaster—by WHO scientist Elisabeth Cardis, who stressed that "the risk estimates are very uncertain."

What about other cancers which take longer to develop? Officially, the WHO stands by its assessment of 1996 that while "there have been some reports of increases in the incidence of specific malignancies in some populations living in contaminated territories and in liquidators, these reports are not consistent and could reflect differences in the follow-up of exposed populations." But some of its scientists are sceptical. They ask not what can be proved, but what can be expected on the basis of known science.

Based on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, Baverstock expects an "excess" of some 6,600 fatal cancers, including 470 leukaemia cases. But a team of Belarusian doctors claims to have found leukaemia rates four times the national average among heavily exposed liquidators. And there are fears that, as with thyroid cancer, rates could be far higher than expected.

But scientific uncertainty should not detract from the fact that there are political reasons why the truth about the disaster may remain hidden, says Muenchmeyer of Greenpeace. National governments, who act as gatekeepers for most of the statistics reaching UN agencies, have a political agenda, he says. The Ukraine is running 14 nuclear reactors with another four under construction, according to the IAEA. "So the Ukraine doesn't want to ruin the image of nuclear power by stressing the harm done by Chernobyl," says Muenchmeyer, "but they also want aid for health programmes. So then they are interested in showing the burden. Often they contradict themselves within a few days."

The Belarus government has consistently downplayed the disaster, even though the country received an estimated 70 per cent of the fall-out. "They decided that the territory and the number of people affected are so great, and the government so poor, that they cannot solve the problem. They decided to shut down dissent," says Muenchmeyer. This has hampered research and apparently prevented findings by local scientists from reaching UN agencies.

Two years ago, Rosa Goncharova of the Institute of Genetics and Cytology in Minsk reported evidence that congenital abnormalities were turning up in the children of those irradiated by Chernobyl. She told a conference that since 1985, cases of cleft palate, Down's syndrome and other deformities had increased by 83 per cent in the areas most heavily contaminated, 30 per cent in moderately contaminated areas and 24 per cent in "clean" areas.

But two years later, when contacted for this article, Cardis of the WHO said she had "not received copies of the paper" by Goncharova. Nor had she received copies of work by the director of the independent Belarusian Institute of Radiation Safety (Belrad), Vasily Nesterenko. He had found that in the most contaminated areas, the incidence of diseases of the circulatory system had risen fourfold and deaths among children from respiratory diseases were up 14-fold (see interview).

The dangers of the twilight zone

And consider the fate of Yuri Bandazhevsky, whose case has been taken up by Amnesty International. As rector of the Gomel Medical Institute, he carried out autopsies at the city's forensic morgue, on bodies whose deaths were not considered connected to Chernobyl. He examined their internal organs and compared them to the organs of rats that he had fed grain containing radioactive caesium. He was shocked by his findings: "The pathological modifications of the kidneys, heart, liver and lungs was identical to those among the experimental rats." From this he concluded, "that accumulation of radiocaesium in the organs played a major role in the triggering of pathological responses." In other words, it made them ill and even killed them.

His paper went ignored. His subsequent criticism of the post-Chernobyl research conducted by the Ministry of Health brought him more enemies. And last summer he was arrested on unspecified bribery charges, and locked up for six months. His computer and all his files were confiscated and he remains confined to Minsk "under investigation."

People are still being exposed to radiation from Chernobyl. In large areas of Belarus in particular the environment is still heavily contaminated. The WHO says "some foods produced by private farmers do exceed [WHO limits]." But it points out that most large farms minimize take-up of radioactivity in soils by deep ploughing and applying fertilizers. "No food produced by collective farms now exceeds the limits."

But thousands of people rely on private farms, according to Belrad's Nesterenko, who maintains that a quarter of the food grown inside the contaminated zone supersedes official radioactivity limits. More than 500 villages are drinking contaminated milk. Moreover, many people rely on "wild" produce such as mushrooms, berries and hunted meat—the most risky food of all says the WHO's Baverstock.

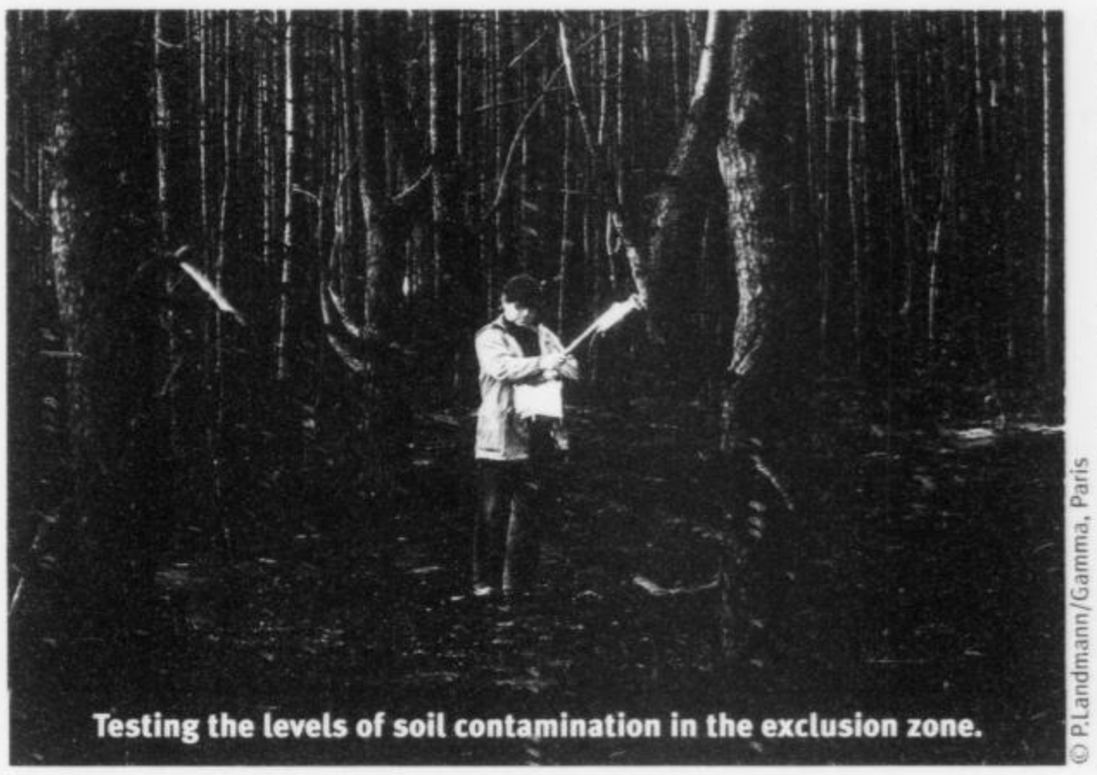
And, of course, there are the people who return to live a twilight life inside the exclusion zone, replanting their contaminated gardens, gathering food from the forests and raiding abandoned food stores. Most are old women, who judged that the radioactivity could do them little harm at their age. But there are recent unconfirmed reports of a baby being born there. The tragedy, as Kofi Annan said, goes on. ■

The world's first radioactive reserve

In the weeks after the accident, coniferous trees and mammals that ate ground vegetation received the highest doses of radiation. Trees died and were buried by the liquidators. Cows grazing heavily contaminated grass near the reactor died. So too did most of the mice in the exclusion zone. Most intriguingly for scientists, the survivors were almost all female. Only after four generations did male numbers begin to recover.

Mona Dreicer, a U.S. researcher who collated material for a major international conference held on the Chernobyl aftermath in 1996 (Vienna), says that levels of radioactivity in surface soils had fallen by a factor of a hundred by the autumn of 1986, and "by 1989 the natural environment had begun to recover." Badly damaged conifers were making cones again and the rodent population was growing fast.

Today, the roll call of wildlife includes wild boar, elk, deer, foxes and some 200 wolves. The list of animals failing to return is relatively short: pigeons and rats, which rely on human leftovers to flourish, as well as swallows, which have apparently fallen prey to genetic disorders.



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Testing the levels of soil contamination in the exclusion zone.

But the region remains heavily contaminated, particularly soils, vegetation, the tree wood and leaf litter on the forest floors that cover roughly a third of the exclusion zone. The zone has become, in effect, the world's first radioactive nature reserve. It is a fantastic laboratory to analyze the impact of radioactive fall-out. Yet says the head of the reserve, Nikolai Voronetsky, most researchers have avoided travelling there, fearing for their own personal safety. It is not surprising, perhaps. Three out of a team of ten botanists who visited in 1986 are now dead, he says.

Voronetsky's own researchers have shown that the internal organs of the wolves and most other creatures remain radioactive. The wolves are particularly worrisome as they stray outside of the reserve, hunting for sheep and horses. The boar tallied the highest geiger-counter readings, says Vorontesky, because they dig into contaminated soil in search of food.

Rosa Goncharova of the Institute of Genetics and Cytology in Minsk says that she has observed increased "genetic anomalies" in rodents and fish in the contaminated zone. Dreicer downplays such reports. "The frequency of these reported defects was shown to be similar in highly contaminated and non-contaminated regions... Leading to the conclusion that they were not due to increased radiation dose," she says. But critics see this as UN "spin." For one thing, you would not expect a close correlation between defects and crude fall-out levels because, as Dreicer herself has pointed out, the vagaries of local soils can lead to grazing animals receiving high doses even in areas that had low fall-out.

There are many ways that radioactivity can "leak into the wider environment." Earlier this year there were fears that fires raging across peat bogs in the contaminated zones could unleash radioactive clouds of smoke. The U.S. embassy sent a team to check for fall-out, but reportedly none was found. Water, however, has proven to be a serious conduit for contamination.

During spring flooding, concentrations of radioactive materials in local rivers increases by up to four times. In fact, the contaminated zone had been flooded six times since the accident, each time washing radioactive material down river, especially along the banks of the Pripyat, which drains into the Dneiper and ultimately the Black Sea. With nine million Ukrainians drinking water from reservoirs on the Dneiper and many more eating food irrigated by the river waters, a European Commission report has concluded that radioactive water is the most important environmental threat still posed by the accident.

Fourteen years after the disaster, radioactive materials are remaining mobile within soils and ecosystems much more than scientists had expected. Jim Smith of the British government's Centre for Ecology and Hydrology reported in May this year that "the environment is not cleaning itself of the pollution at the rate we previously thought." In places, he said caesium was being "re-released into the ecosystem" as the Chernobyl legacy begins a new cycle. ■

F.P.

Chernobyl: the political fall-out continues

BELARUS: FACING THE DISASTER ALONE

INTERVIEW BY GALIA ACKERMAN
OF RADIO FRANCE INTERNATIONALE

The Chernobyl nuclear disaster continues to threaten the survival of the Belarusian people, says Vasily Nesterenko, a local physicist*

© Sergei Grits/AP/Boomerang, Paris

On April 26, 2000, crowds marched in downtown Minsk to mark the anniversary of the disaster.

You maintain that the effects of the Chernobyl disaster have been played down not just by your own country's leaders but also by international organizations...

The UN Scientific Committee on the Effects of Atomic Radiation (UNSCEAR) relies on the figures of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), which represents the nuclear lobby. In evaluating the disaster, the IAEA has compared Chernobyl to Hiroshima and Nagasaki. But in Japan, the thermo-nuclear reactions took place entirely in the air and the soil was not contaminated. After the Chernobyl fire, neighbouring countries were bombarded by hundreds of tonnes of radionuclides (or particles). The soil of Belarus alone absorbed two-thirds of the fall-out and some of the nuclides, such as caesium-137, stay radioactive for more than 30 years. Food accounts for 80 per cent of the long-term contamination of the population. Since the disaster, my institute has been systematically monitoring children with special spectrometers. My colleague, Prof. Yuri Bandazhevsky, was the first to link the accumulation of radioactivity in people's bodies to their illnesses. The contamination has caused many diseases not recognized by international organizations.

What are these ailments?

After doing thousands of autopsies, Bandazhevsky and his team showed that caesium-137 had accumulated in muscle tissue, beginning with the heart. Two-thirds of the 2,000 children monitored in the highly-contaminated area of Gomel have heart problems. The concentration of caesium in the kidneys has also caused serious malfunctions from an early age. Caesium in the eye muscles leads to cataracts. For example, a 1997 study in Svetlovisy, near Gomel, found that a quarter of children between 13 and 15 had cataracts.

During pregnancy, the placenta in mothers-to-be stores caesium which irradiates the foetus and after the birth, the mother breastfeeds the baby with contaminated milk. This leads to several diseases, such as "Chernobyl AIDS," which is an immunity disorder. The radioactive particles also combine with lead (which was used in 1986 to put out the fire and was then absorbed into the ground) to cause mental retardation and stomach ailments. We are heading towards a national disaster.

What does your country need most?

Two million people, a quarter of them children, are living in contaminated areas. We have to set up mobile units to monitor these people and what they eat. My institute doesn't have many resources, so can only do very little monitoring. It's also threatened with closure because the government doesn't want the "disturbing" news to spread. The contaminated children need to be sent for a month's stay in clean areas at least twice a year and be given pectin-based pills, which are effective, very cheap and made in Ukraine, though not here. We have to set up centres for young mothers in areas where they can eat uncontaminated food while pregnant and breast-feeding.

Why hasn't your government raised the alarm about all this?

Belarus is facing alone a disaster it's not responsible for. Neither Russia nor Ukraine, where Chernobyl is located, has helped us. Our national budget only allows a small amount of money to be spent on the victims and our government officials believe they know best. But they haven't properly evaluated the situation. They've lied to tens of thousands of Russians who have come from "hot spots" or crisis areas in the former Soviet Union to live in the contaminated region.[1] They're still lying to their own people. They have a head-in-the-sand attitude. Only massive international aid and strong logistical support by the government will ensure the survival of my people in the long run. ■

** Vasily Nesterenko is former director of the Nuclear Energy Institute of the National Academy of Sciences of Belarus and currently head of the independent Institute of Radiation Safety (Belrad)*

1 After the collapse of the Soviet Union, 25 million Russians found themselves living outside the new borders of Russia, mainly in Central Asia and the Caucasus where there was and still is war. The Belarusian government encouraged them to settle in the contaminated areas by giving them housing, jobs and resident status.

The bias behind nomadic education

All too often, education has been touted as the key to transforming nomadic identity, which goes a long way towards explaining its patchy record

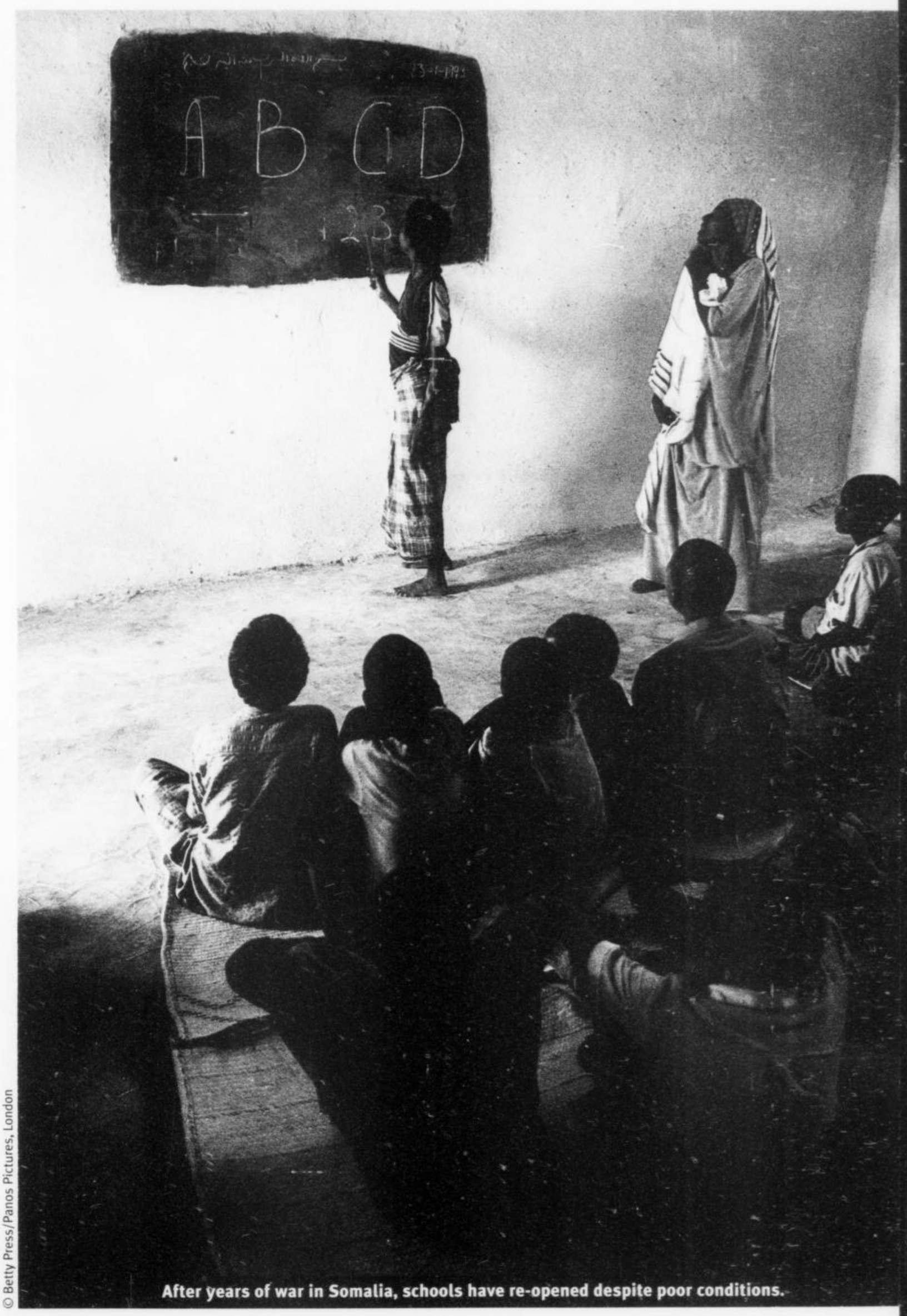
SAVERIO KRATLI

RESEARCHER AT THE INSTITUTE OF DEVELOPMENT STUDIES (SUSSEX)

ife in the dry lands is harsh. There is no sheltering shade, the sun cracks the soil and watering the animals is a daunting task in the dry season. But the pastoralists know how to survive. They know that nobody can go without eating and drinking for as long as they can, except perhaps the other group of pastoralists on the other side of the escarpment. When the rainy season finally comes, if indeed it ever does, the pasture is glorious and the herd fattens quickly. They know their animals one by one, their colour and behaviour, their "parents" and so forth, going back several generations. To the pastoralists, these animals are more than beautiful; they have individuality.

A clash of cultures

When addressing the education of pastoralists, it is all too often forgotten that to be a "pastoralist" means being Turkana (Kenya), Rabari (India), Qashqa'i (Iran), or from some other community. It is an identity these people take pride in, a complex and sophisticated way of life which, with all its harshness, they profoundly love. Education, however, has mainly been intended as an instrument to transform the pastoralists into something else. The history of mass education programmes for nomads has been that of an encounter between people seeking new ways of adapting to an evolving context—monetarization of the economy, commodification of labour and privatization of land—and a broad set of actors, from policy-makers and project officers to teachers and local officials, who widely believe that nomads have to be "saved" from their way of life. It is upon this cultural clash that the "problem" of delivering mass education to nomads has been framed and policy solutions devised.



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After years of war in Somalia, schools have re-opened despite poor conditions.

Nomadic herders number several tens of millions of people, mainly in African dry lands, the Middle East, and southwest, south and central Asia. They include some of the most vulnerable of all southern populations. They often make a significant contribution to national food production. Mobility, harsh environmental conditions and remoteness have always stood as barriers to the provision of formal education, and millions of nomadic pastoral children remain outside the system.

Political motives underpin initiatives

Mongolia, a country where the majority of the population is nomadic, stands as a case apart. Compulsory state education for children between eight and 18 began in 1940. The system relied on hundreds of schools with dormitory facilities built in all rural settlements. Education was free, accounting for more than15 per cent of GDP. Schools were well staffed, with highly motivated and comparatively well-paid teachers, most of whom came from a nomadic background. Within the following 20 years, Mongolia passed from around two to more than 90 per cent literacy and by 1990, before liberalization, the country had almost reached a rate of 100 per cent. This unprecedented figure—unmatched ever since with a nomadic population—can hardly be explained in terms of innovative programme content. The standard curriculum was highly academic and teacher-centred in nature. Instead, the crucial factor had more to do with a sympathetic human environment and the absence of a rift between the culture of the school and that of the nomads.

But Mongolia is a chiefly nomadic country. Although scarce documentation and widely differing contexts make it difficult to paint a general history of nomadic education, political motives always underpin initiatives. In Somalia, a short-lived rural development campaign launched in 1974 took a bold approach: the government simply closed down all secondary schools for one year and sent 20,000 students and teachers to the countryside to teach literacy to the largely nomadic population. They used methods learnt in Koranic schools, writing letters on a blackboard, reading them aloud and asking pupils to repeat. This was, at least in intention, a two-way campaign, as one of the slogans underlined: "What you know, teach; what you do not know, learn." Hindered by the 1974 drought, the campaign was nevertheless a surprising success: in only seven months, 910,000 of the 1.2 million students registered sat the final test and 800,000 passed.

A more common reason for providing education to nomadic pastoralists emerged when a number of newly independent African states realized that some of the dry lands and the livestock were valuable "national" resources. As such, pastoralists had to become more closely integrated into the economy, notably by increasing production. The task of "modernizing" the nomads was left to education. The Kenyan case is instructive. In 1970, the Parliament amended the Anglo-Maasai agreement, which kept the reserves closed to non-Maasai, and launched a programme aimed at improving enrolment by setting up low-cost boarding schools. But the new educational facilities were flooded by pupils from non-pastoral ethnic groups and were disregarded by the Maasai. In the late 1970s, when an evaluation found that the boarding schools were operating below capacity, the government decided to temporarily cut funds to the programme. Some analysts argued that carrying out education in the absence of economic development and related social services had been a mistake. The 1984-1988 Development Plan concentrated on improving livestock resources, marketing facilities and banking services, assuming that demand for education would stem from increased monetary resources. Rather than look at the programme's shortcomings, the blame was put on pastoralists' "backward" way of life. All that policy-makers had to do was reverse the equation: from education as a path towards development, to development as a path towards education.

Although governments may no longer be trying to transform pastoralists into settled farmers, they are still trying to transform them into "something else," such as "modern" livestock producers

Mainstream explanations for the failure of education provision in pastoral areas usually blame the recipients. It is assumed that the problem stems from the nomads' obsolete way of life and cultural conservatism, rather than from the incapacity of a national system to respond to the living conditions of a significant number of its citizens. Research is practically inexistent on the impact of education. Figures on enrolment and attendance rely on local records that are often incomplete and inaccurate, yet these figures are usually the main yardstick used to measure the outcomes of education programmes. The most profound impact of these programmes remains an untold story. Social norms, networks and relationships of authority play a critical role in pastoral livelihood systems, which education often tends to undermine. A divide often sets in between educated and non-educated members of communities. Recent research underlines how projects of directed change are embedded into education programmes for nomads, tending to antagonize local learning and socialization patterns. Although governments may no longer be trying to transform pastoralists into settled farmers, they are still trying to transform them into "something else," such as "modern" livestock producers, as in Nigeria.

Hooking nomads to the system

With the push for decentralization and cost-sharing in education over the past ten years, some governments are turning to innovative partnerships with international development agencies rather than investing in mass education programmes. Pastoral areas are particularly targeted, given that they have the lowest literacy rates. A few non-formal education programmes are now focusing on providing a service directly related to life in pastoral societies. By moving away from the emphasis on productivity, there is room to address crucial livelihood issues such as resource access, conflict management and local advocacy. In Senegal, training modules have been developed in local languages for pastoralists. In Kenya, an out-of-school programme launched in 1992 has set up learning centres offering non-formal primary education to nomad children, with strong community involvement.

But these alternative approaches do not address the structural inadequacy of education systems. They are often about getting beneficiaries "hooked" to "fit the system," and are but a parallel second-class education. Unless the power issue behind the formal/non-formal divide is addressed, even the best education programmes may only result into channelling out-of-school children into persistently unresponsive systems. ■

The bias behind nomadic education

SCHOOL, THE TUAREGS' NEW WEAPON

YVES BERGERET

FRENCH WRITER AND TEACHER, FOUNDER OF THE LANGUAGE AND SPACE ASSOCIATION SPECIALIZED IN NORTH-SOUTH ARTISTIC PROJECTS

The Tuaregs have shed their longtime reticence towards schooling but questions remain over how the system chooses to deal with their nomadic lifestyle. Countries in sub-Saharan Africa have come up with different solutions

"For the past few years, people in all the settlements have supported and valued schooling," says a representative of local school parents. "Things are changing and our nomadic culture seems to be evolving."

The pupils at the little schoolhouse at Imbassassoutène, south of Timbuktu, include Peul and Tuareg nomad children. Its six classes offer both primary and secondary education, catering to students from six to 18. In the evening, literacy classes are held there for adults.

Not all schools in the region boast such a record. The school at Djebok, 40 kms east of Gao, counts 254 children enrolled in four primary classes, but only 25 in its five secondary grades. Mohamed ag Hamadida, the headmaster, says about 15 per cent of the children drop out each year. The reasons: some settlements are far from the school, while tradition stipulates that looking after cattle is more noble and worthwhile than attending what is known as "the French school."

The children are taught by the "convergent" method, which mainly relies on using Tamazight, the Tuareg mother tongue, when they start school. The first year, three quarters of the lessons are in Tamazight. French, Mali's official language, takes on increasing importance to become the only one used by the time the children reach their sixth year.

Education in its "modern" form was introduced during the French colonial era and coldly welcomed by the Tuaregs. The tribal chiefs refused to let their sons go to school, sending children taken from serf families instead. After independence, distrust remained towards an institution that was foreign to the traditional culture and threatened to force nomads into adopting a sedentary lifestyle.

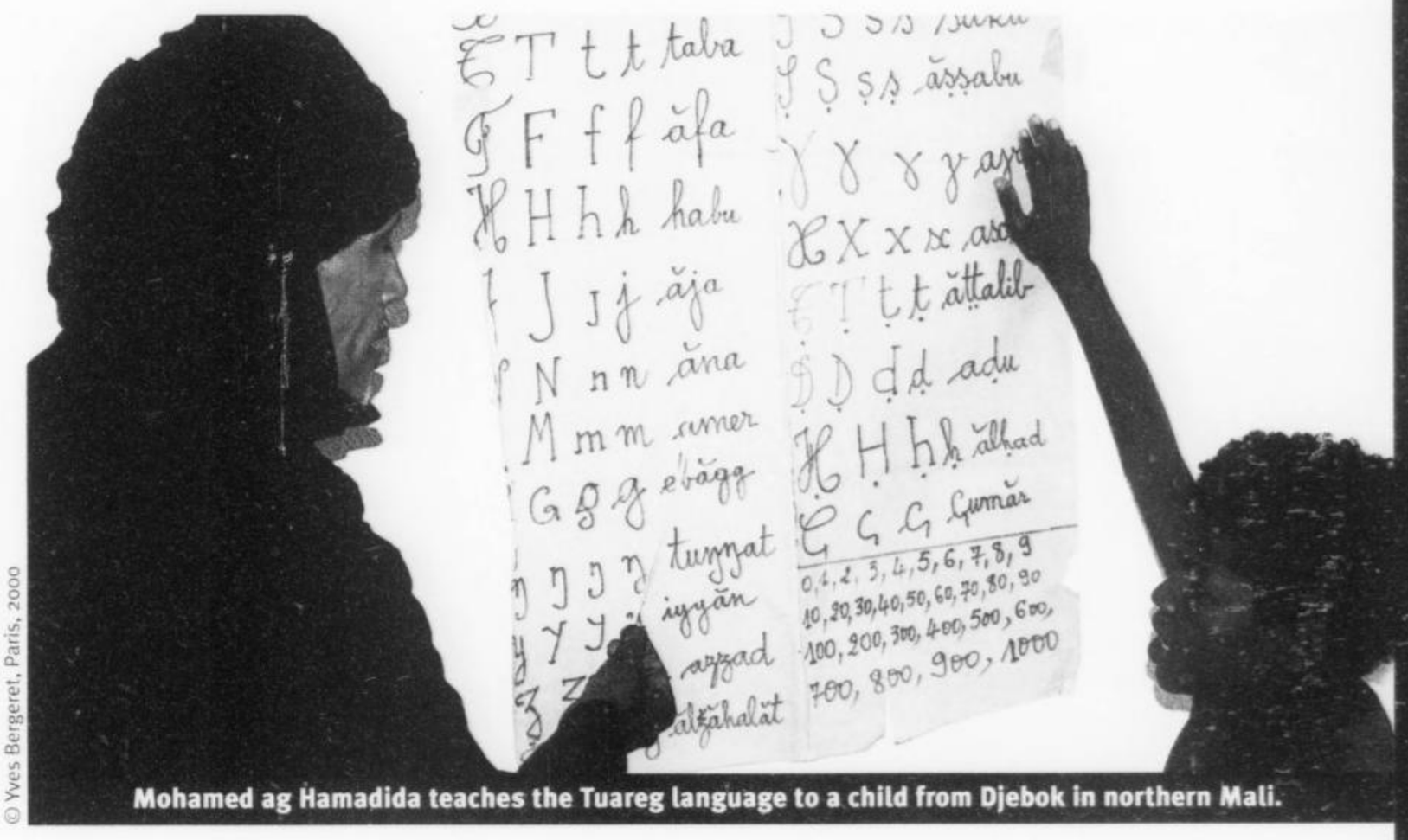
But recent events have revolutionized the lives of the Tuaregs. Major droughts in 1973 and 1984 and then armed rebellion in the early 1990s[1] and subsequent repression caused large migrations. The peace agreements in Mali (1992) and Niger (1995) allowed the displaced people to return with the help of the UN High Commission for Refugees, but not until 1996. Many parents then changed their attitude and concluded that going to school could help their offspring find jobs away from the world of nomadic cattle-herding. Education had also proved useful during the peace negotiations and later to help Tuaregs secure government jobs.

Many partners are involved in the education of Tuareg children, including the World Bank, the Organization of Petroleum-Exporting Countries (OPEP), USAID, the Islamic Development Bank, the French group Volunteers for Progress and Dutch and French government aid bodies.

The host countries contribute too. Emmanuel Sagara, director of basic education for the Gao region, held a seminar in the Chadian capital, Ndjamena, in January 2000, that brought together education experts and officials from Burkina Faso, Mauritania, Niger, Chad and Mali. Policies vary widely from country to country. Chad has travelling schools, whose teachers move with the nomads. Niger has opted for a mixed system, with children spending six months in a school and the rest of the year tending animals. Mali has chosen to set up a series of "sites" which include a school and a nearby well to attract and accommodate the nomads.

Sagara says school attendance by 6-12-year-olds is 36 per cent in the Gao region, with girls accounting for 18 per cent of the total. But there are no figures on how many nomad children are among them because language and ethnic origin are not seen as relevant.

Souleymane ag Mehdi, who runs Télouét, an NGO specialized on economic development in northern Mali, also notes a change of attitude among the Tuaregs that he attributes to a post-rebellion re-evaluation. Despite the risk of educated young Tuaregs becoming assimilated, he stresses the role that the most enlightened of them could play in avoiding this outcome. The key is to support Tuareg culture, namely through publishing, newspapers, museums and research and documentation centres. So far, none of the above exist. ■



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Mohamed ag Hamadida teaches the Tuareg language to a child from Djebok in northern Mali.

1. *Following an armed rebellion and ethnic strife in northern Mali between 1990 and 1994, over 150,000 Malians fled the country. By mid-1995, due to the implementation of a peace agreement, and efforts by the Malian authorities to secure national reconciliation, stability has been re-established in northern Mali.*

F O C U S

THE RA
Asian

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The year 2000 is looking particularly auspicious for Asian cinema. From Iran, Japan, South Korea or China, film-makers in the East are raking in awards at the most prestigious festivals, such as those in Cannes, Venice and Locarno (pp. 20-21). The same creative muscle is hard to find in the West, where the industry is now dominated by the laws of entertainment and profit (pp.22-23).

While neo-realism seems to be a major influence, each of these new waves has marked its own path. Ironically, as Iranian cinema grabs the international limelight, it is losing the official acceptance it won after the revolution of 1979 (pp. 26-28). In the dying days of Japan's major studios, young filmmakers are finding limited budgets alongside new-found freedom to focus on a disillusioned generation (pp.28-30). The advent of democracy in South Korea and efforts to defend local production have spawned a new generation of directors who are winning plaudits at home and abroad. At the same time, China's "sixth generation" of directors is flourishing despite public indifference and the struggle against censorship (p.33).

On the other side of the world, some South American directors are making their own waves. The seventh art is proving to be particularly fertile in Argentina, where directors are turning a poetic eye to life on the street (pp.34-36). While filmmakers in exile add to the ranks of this movement (pp.37-38), the advent of new technologies (p. 39) may carry it to new creative grounds.

Dossier concept and coordination by Sophie Boukhari and James Burnet, respectively journalist and editor in chief of the UNESCO Courier.

AGE FOR cinema

OPINION

THE WONDERFUL WORLD OF FILMMAKING

BY MARTÍN REJTMAN

ARGENTINE FILMMAKER, DIRECTOR OF *SILVIA PRIETO* (1999)

When you make films and are lucky enough to get one shown at a festival, you can then set off round the world taking your movie from one festival to another. It's a big opportunity, not just for making your name–vital for those of us outside mainstream cinema–but also because you discover other independent films and come to realize you're not alone.

I have followed this filmmaker's pilgrimage, and have met fellow directors in Taiwan, South Korea, Japan and Iran. In Berlin, Nantes, Rotterdam and at Sundance, I have also witnessed a powerful new wave of films coming from Asia that has coincided with a revival of filmmaking in Latin America. There is no single theme or style. Each film is different, but all are intent on depicting real life and all are made with paltry resources.

I shot one of my films, *Rapado* (Close Cut), with a grant from the Rotterdam festival to write a script outline. What pays for a synopsis in Europe can fund a whole feature film in Argentina. Having no money isn't a virtue, but it does focus your mind and forces you to look for narrative solutions that fit your budget. Japanese filmmakers agree with us South Americans that film schools should be used as a nursery for directors and technicians, and as a way into the profession. Buenos Aires now has more than 15 film schools, a profusion that can only inspire people to make films.

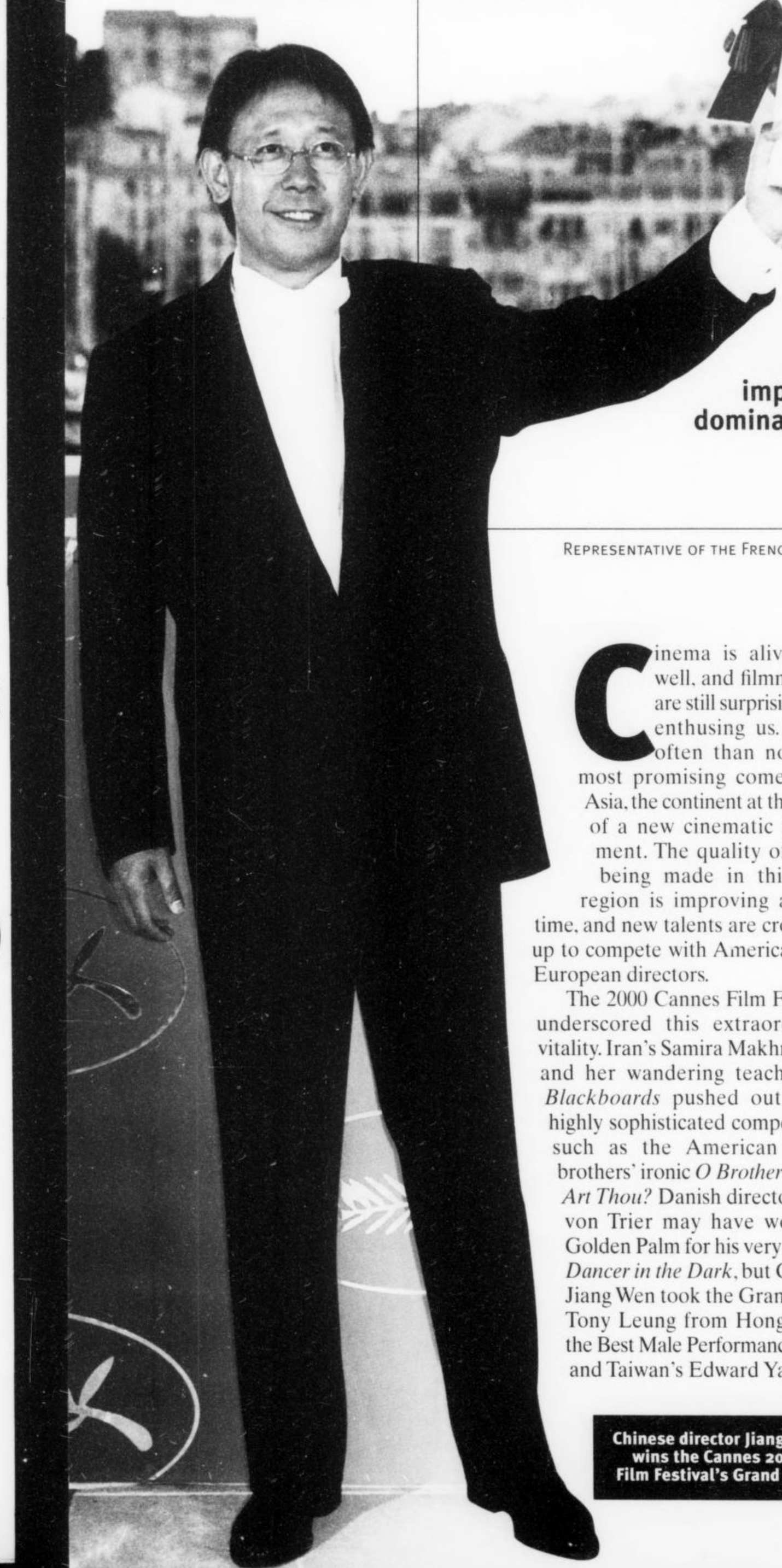
Has Western cinema lost its way? Maybe, but there are still some great directors. Films made in developed countries these days tend to suffocate you with the same tired old plots and easy images drawn from ubiquitous television. In Iran, you can still tackle a subject in a fresh and innocent way and film something with the feeling that you are showing it on screen for the first time. Iranian film is rife with this "first-time" element, and it's what gives it special strength. Filmmakers in Taiwan work under different conditions, but they too have managed to get down to basics by delving into their country's past and casting light on a society that sometimes doubts its very existence.

You can't say the same for the Japanese film industry, which has a long history and is now rivalled by a fast-growing audio-visual world of TV channels and video games. There's no room for innocence here, only crafty, intelligent and subversive use of current formats. Directors from Japan and Hong Kong borrow advertising, video and other well-worn techniques to tell other stories and spark a different set of emotions.

This upsurge of "new waves" may be related to the general decline or disappearance of government subsidies for filmmaking. Apart from the United States, where such help isn't needed because of the captive domestic market, government aid to local film industries has dried up in most countries. The subsidies that remain have in any case stagnated, with money nearly always going to the same places. It would be tremendous if governments were to back something that has now begun to flower naturally in so many parts of the world.

A lack of state support has perhaps given rise to another trend. This is the rise of new producers, individuals and institutions working without any national anchoring. It's another form of globalization, aimed at specific film projects satisfying particular desires and needs, bringing together people who share a love for a special kind of cinema and a wish to see something different to the deathless fare served up by giant distribution chains. ■

1. FROM WEST



© Eric Robert/Corbis Sygma, Paris

Chinese director Jiang Wen wins the Cannes 2000 Film Festival's Grand Prix.

Asia's magic lantern

Astonishing and moving films from Asia and Iran are giving cinema a fresh impetus and countering American attempts to dominate the world's film industry

ALAIN JALLADEAU

Representative of the French Film Library in Nantes and founder and director of the Three Continents Festival

Cinema is alive and well, and filmmakers are still surprising and enthusing us. More often than not, the most promising come from Asia, the continent at the head of a new cinematic movement. The quality of films being made in this vast region is improving all the time, and new talents are cropping up to compete with American and European directors.

The 2000 Cannes Film Festival underscored this extraordinary vitality. Iran's Samira Makhmalbaf and her wandering teachers in *Blackboards* pushed out some highly sophisticated competitors, such as the American Coen brothers' ironic *O Brother Where Art Thou?* Danish director Lars von Trier may have won the Golden Palm for his very nordic *Dancer in the Dark*, but China's Jiang Wen took the Grand Prix, Tony Leung from Hong Kong the Best Male Performance prize and Taiwan's Edward Yang the prize for Best Director. The Locarno Film Festival confirmed the trend in August by awarding its Golden Leopard prize to Chinese director Wang Shuo's *Baba* and the Silver Leopard to Hong Kong's Fruit Chan for *Little Cheung*. Asian films also figured prominently at the Venice Film Festival in September, with *The Circle* by Iranian director Jafar Panahi reaping the Golden Lion.

Such surges of new talent are nothing new in cinema. In the early 1960s, the "new wave" in the French film industry provided the paradigmatic example of how this could be done. Since then, there have seen many such creative rebellions—in Poland (Roman Polanski, Jerzy Skolimowski), Czechoslovakia (Milos Forman, Ivan Passer), Japan (Nagisa Oshima, Shohei Imamura) and Brazil (Glauber Rocha, Ruy Guerra).

Wherever they arise, these new waves—since the term has become part of our basic vocabulary—share common traits. They reflect a protest against traditional concepts of filmmaking, led by artists calling for greater freedom of expression as a way of escaping from the straightjacket imposed by the film industry of that time. A few strong personalities carry others with them, a movement takes shape and then blossoms.

But today one factor has changed in the equation: the American movie business has since strengthened its grip and taken over nearly all the cinemas around the world. Its commercial strength remains unrivalled, even though the quest for domination has badly eroded the creativity of American film. It would be hard to find the modern equivalent of a John Cassavetes, whose emblematic *Shadows* (1960) inspired a whole generation of filmmakers.

TO EAST

In the face of this U.S. juggernaut, how have today's new waves managed to take hold the world over? First of all, they have been recognized by international critics, who have always done the spadework when it comes to spotting new talents. One need only remember the pivotal role played by Henri Langlois, head of France's National Film Library, critics like André Bazin, directors such as Jean-Luc Godard and François Truffaut and a whole team of "Young Turks" at the French *Cahiers du Cinéma* magazine in bringing to light a pack of directors from the U.S., Japan, India, the ex-Soviet Union, Scandinavia and elsewhere.

Freshness and simplicity: the keys to Iranian success

Film festivals, such as Cannes, Venice, Berlin, London and Nantes, sought out new high-quality work to enhance their programmes, helping important filmmakers get established. Obviously, neither critics nor festivals can create new cinematic movements. But they can give them the chance to break through and enable directors to continue making films, while sometimes even attracting support from authorities in their home countries.

Taiwan's case is instructive. The Three Continents Festival in Nantes (France) gave prizes in 1984 and 1985 to two films by Taiwanese director Hou Hsiao-hsien, who went on to win international acclaim. The Taiwanese authorities then decided to back the most promising directors and help spur the growth of a new film industry. Unfortunately, this policy was soon abandoned. Hou, Yang and Tsai Ming-liang have enough of a reputation to raise backing abroad, but for younger filmmakers, things are much tougher (see page 33).

Although American hegemony has had devastating effects in some Asian countries (in Indonesia, for example, American companies control 99 per cent of distribution and have stifled local filmmaking), the continent's overall scene is one of buzzing creativity.

Iran provides the finest example of dynamic cinema. Modern Iranian films are enrapturing, with an element of surprise and a human sensitivity that is hard to find in American movies. A sense of freshness and simplicity explain the appeal of these films. The country was producing such films long before the ayatollahs took power in 1979 (see page 26). In the 1970s, Abbas Kiarostami had already made such remarkable films as *Traveller* (1974) and *The Report* (1977). But it was not until the 1988 Three Continents Festival that a Kiarostami film, in this case *Where is the Friend's Home* (1987), was shown outside Iran. The new government had done nothing to help the industry sell its films abroad, and few festivals were able to show the works of Iranian directors. It took many years for people to realize how creative their films were, and how filmmakers had managed to overcome censorship with a strong, personal and original style. Elsewhere in Asia, Japan stands out as a leader in the creative arts. Beginning with a Hollywood-style big studio system, its golden age, in my opinion, has never won the recognition it truly deserved. In the 1950s, Japan was producing about 650 films a year—more than the United States—and could boast great directors like Kenji Misogushi, Yasujiro Ozu, Mikio Naruse, Akira Kurosawa, whose talents were sometimes slow to be recognized. As the big studios declined and these directors disappeared, another generation arose, including names such as Nagisa Oshima and Shohei Imamura, who expressed themselves with greater freedom by tackling subjects that were more social and violent. Today the country is turning out a new wave of provocative directors like Kiyoshi Kurosawa, Shinji Aoyama, and Shinya Tsukamoto (see page 28).

Cinema is, of course, the most international art. Sergei Eisenstein, Soviet film director (1898-1948)

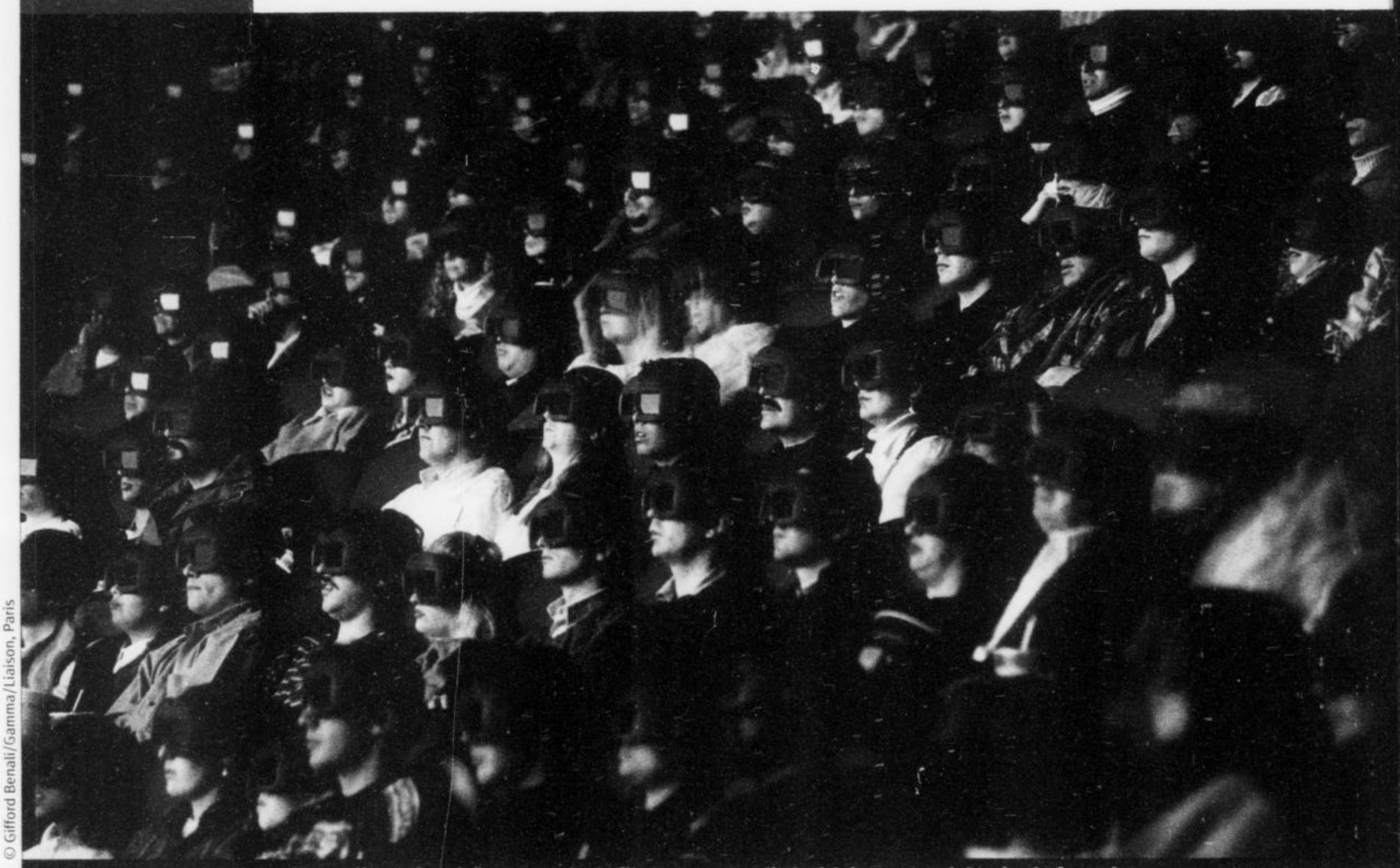
These new film movements—and there are many more, such as in South Korea (page 31) and Argentina (page 35)—guarantee cinema's survival. Critics and festivals have not invented them. They are simply helping such work reach audiences eager to support quality films. So long as this continues, there is reason to remain optimistic. ■

THE THREE CONTINENTS FESTIVAL

Created in 1979 in Nantes (France) by brothers Philippe and Alain Jalladeau, who were both inspired by a love for cinema and travel, the Three Continents Festival became the very first in the world devoted to Asian, African and Latin American cinema, and has so far showcased over 1,000 films. By including premieres of feature films, retrospectives of noted directors, tributes to an actor or actress and programmes of films from just one country, the festival has provided a host of different ways to gauge the movements of world cinema. This year's event will take place from November 21-28.

The selection panel chooses films that reflect the social, historical and cultural conditions of the three continents. From Uzbekistan to Iran, Palestine to Egypt, Mali to Niger, India to China, passing on the way through Korea, Brazil and Bolivia, the festival never fails to present radically different cinematic points of view. By discovering the first films of a number of directors, the festival has also helped win recognition for some of cinema's most distinctive new auteurs: Mali's Souleymane Cissé, China's Chen Kiage, Iran's Abbas Kiarostami, Taiwan's Hou Hsiao-hsien and Tsaï Ming-liang and Kazakhstan's Darezhan Omirbayev. The festival has also contributed to the renown of Indian directors like Satyajit Ray, Ritwick Ghatak and Guru Dutt, Japanese director Shohei Imamura, and Brazilian Pereira dos Santos. ■

FOR MORE INFORMATION:
http://www.3continents.com
http://www.cinema.diplomatie.fr



© Gifford Benali/Gamma/Liaison, Paris

Three-dimensional cinema: today's film-goers are plied with images and deprived of passion.

Breathless West, brilliant East

Economic value dominates everything in the West, and cinema is no exception. Made for profit, moulded by television, most movies have become pure entertainment. The results are a big turn-off

JOAN DUPONT

PARIS-BASED CINEMA CRITIC FOR THE *INTERNATIONAL HERALD TRIBUNE*

Every film-buff in Europe knows the name of Paulo Branco, a renowned Portuguese producer who has worked with Manoel de Olivera, Raul Ruiz and Chantal Ackerman, directors whose idiosyncratic styles have helped keep independent cinema afloat. Branco's views of current American and European cinema have become clouded with pessimism: Western cinema, he says, "has slipped into a kind of comfort level, while filmmakers from China, Hong Kong, Taiwan, and Korea have had to struggle and use their imagination, which gives their films edge and audacity."

The dominance of economic values and the search for prosperity in the West appears to have deprived the region's filmmakers of creative muscle. In contrast, Asia's political, economic and social upheavals have bred a cultural tension reflected in its flourishing, dynamic cinema. "The culture is changing enormously, and telling stories is a way of dealing with the changes," declares Piers Handling, director of the Toronto Festival. "Look at post 1917 Russia, post-World War I Germany, post-World War II Italy, post-1959 Cuba, post-colonial France in the late 50s—all started producing dynamic films. This energy tends to be dispersed when things are going well. Hollywood's Golden Age in the 30s and 40s was largely due to a flood of talent from Europe, people running away from communism or fascism and finding themselves in a country full of immigrants."

New York critic Dave Kehr, who sits on the selection committee of the Lincoln Center's New York Film Festival, feels the same. In his opinion, the vitality of Eastern cinema may have something to do with these countries' resistance to post-modernist irony and self reference. "They take their stories and

their genres seriously, whereas the West has lost belief in the old formulas without finding anything viable to replace them."

But Gilles Jacob, president of the Cannes festival—which this year awarded its Golden Palm to Danish director Lars Von Trier's deeply northern *Dancer in the Dark* and prizes to three Chinese films and young Iranian director Samira Makhmalbaf—remains to be convinced of such a categorical difference. "Iranian cinema is poetic, fresh. The consecration of Asian cinema is happening now, but the movement has been growing for years; Kiarostami is almost 60. The jury's choice, however, doesn't diminish the value of other cinemas. French cinema is also on the rise."

After years of failing to recognize filmmakers from the East, the West now seems only too ready to welcome them with open arms. "For years we pretended we could ignore anything that wasn't American, European, and sometimes Japanese," says Marco Muller, who recently left his post as director of the Locarno festival and co-produced Makhmalbaf's *Blackboards* and Zhang Yuan's *Seventeen Years*. "We all have a debt towards U.S. cinema because it's the first syntax we were exposed to, but now, we're being exposed to others from Asia, Africa and Latin America. The Cannes and Toronto festivals established credibility for these films. It's not just story telling, but a different film universe that has been shaping up in the past two decades. Western reality desperately needed an injection of something new and that has come from those who have been shut out by the industry."

In the United States, meanwhile, business values and the power of the studios have only served to squeeze diversity out of film production. "In Europe," says Paulo Branco, "we're all independent; in America, even Martin Scorcese, who started out independent, knows how to handle being recuperated by the system."

Foreign films: the desperate search for distributors

And America does not really have auteurs. French producer Francesca Feder learnt in New York's Spanish Harlem, where she made Raphael Nadjari's *The Shade*. "In America, you have kilos of film school movies shown at Sundance, a festival that is like a marketing machine. They look like studio movies made with less money. Miramax buys a couple, and the fledgling director graduates to the studio."

Annette Insdorf, in charge of cinema studies at Columbia University, disagrees, remarking that despite the appetite for Asian cinema, U.S. independents flourish while films from other countries like Poland, Hungary, Brazil, Italy and Germany that dominated festivals in previous decades are much less visible. "Independent films in the U.S. are being produced in larger quantities, thanks partly to digital video and new venues like Showtime on TV. But foreign language films are having a harder time in the U.S. partly because independent American films are flooding the market."

Her view is echoed by Jacques Bidou, a Paris-based producer who worked with Haitian Raoul Peck on *Lumumba* and Cambodian Rithy Panh on *Un soir apres la guerre* (One evening after the war). Bidou acknowledges that independent American films still have the advantages of language and a larger scope: "The volume of American films that invade theatres and television in Europe prevents distribution of those made by other nations," he says. "The problem is not creativity, it's distribution. We see movements in China, Taiwan, Japanese and Korea, countries in which national films have an audience. But when the market is so small, the film needs foreign distribution. Television doesn't buy foreign language films, and distributors won't take the risk."

The most visually overwhelmed generation

Television's strong-arm in production has certainly cut into filmmaking ambition, dictating the nature of movies even down to the casting. Piers Handling (director of the Toronto festival) feels that Western cinema is now almost totally oriented towards the marketplace and the notion of providing entertainment. "Western audiences have been devastated by the impact of television—they are the most visually overwhelmed generation in history, so their idea of what constitutes the moving image experience is a dumbed-down version of life. To get them to pay attention you cannot give them small, intimate stories about real people—too boring and underwhelming—you have to give them sensation." As a result, Handling's Toronto festival, which is non-competitive, has picked up on new trends in world cinema and drawn films from cultures that he argues "are not yet media-saturated, that still have a literary or verbal culture, such as Iran and China, and are making the best films in the world."

Photography is truth. And cinema is truth 24 times a second. Jean-Luc Godard, French film director (1930-)

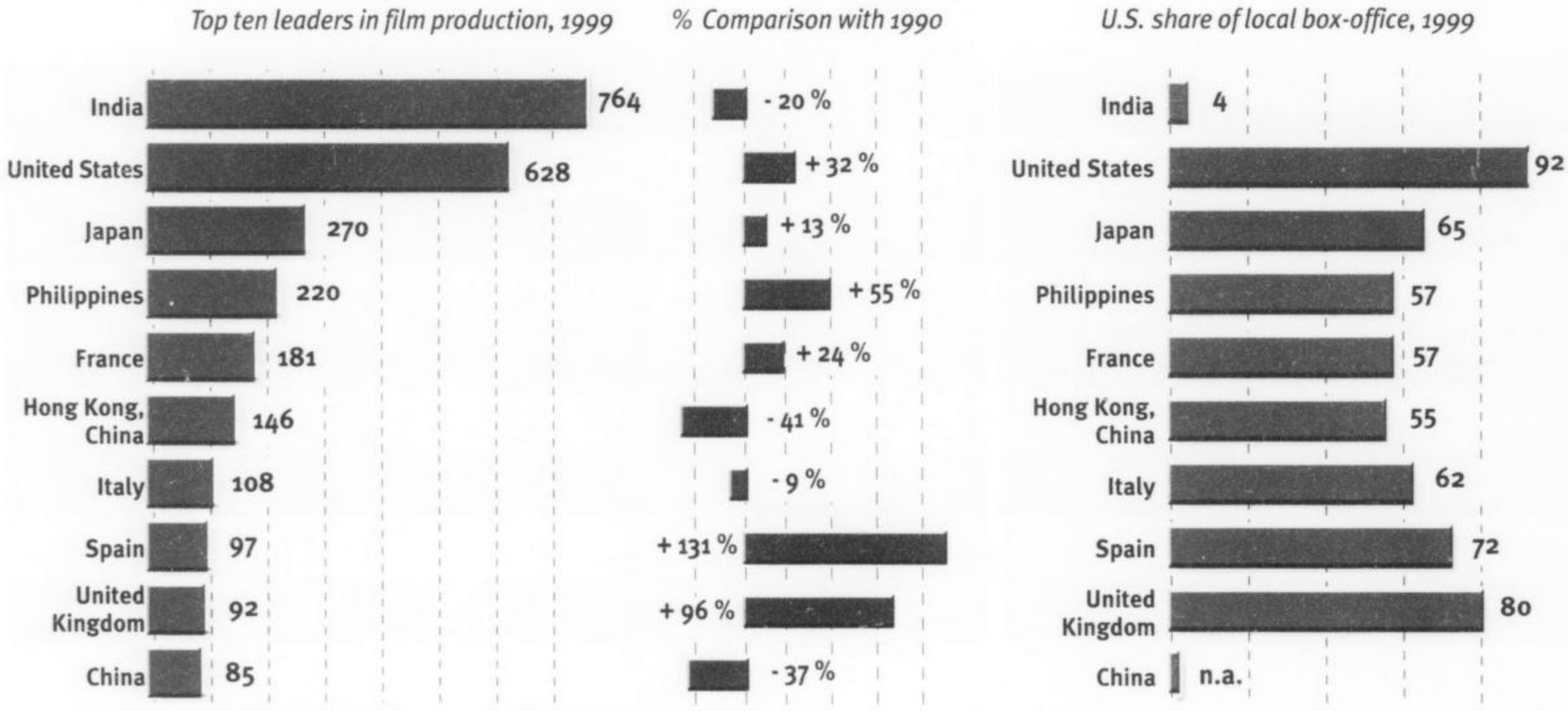
Yet hope remains for the Western film industry, argues Gilles Jacob, insisting that there is still money to make more challenging movies. "Cinema is always in the red, globally speaking," he says. "We have to put fresh money into the system and we need new people, like Francis Bouygues, who launched Ciby 2000." Over the past few years, Ciby 2000—a French production company—has co-produced films by David Lynch, Quentin Tarantino and Pedro Almodovar. The international trend for French producers has developed even further: Humbert Balsan produces Egyptian Youssef Chahine and Yousri Nasrallah, as well as Sandrine Veysset; Marin Karmitz produces American independent Johnathan Nossiter and Austrian Michael Haneke; while Michel Propper produced Israeli Amos Gitai and Peter Brook of Britain. With several critical and commercial successes under its belt, cinema's alternative globalization appears well underway. ■

A giant among

On the whole, the film market has taken a nosedive as cinema admissions have fallen to a fifth of what they were ten years ago. There is one exception: the American film industry is making huge gains in the U.S. and worldwide

Production

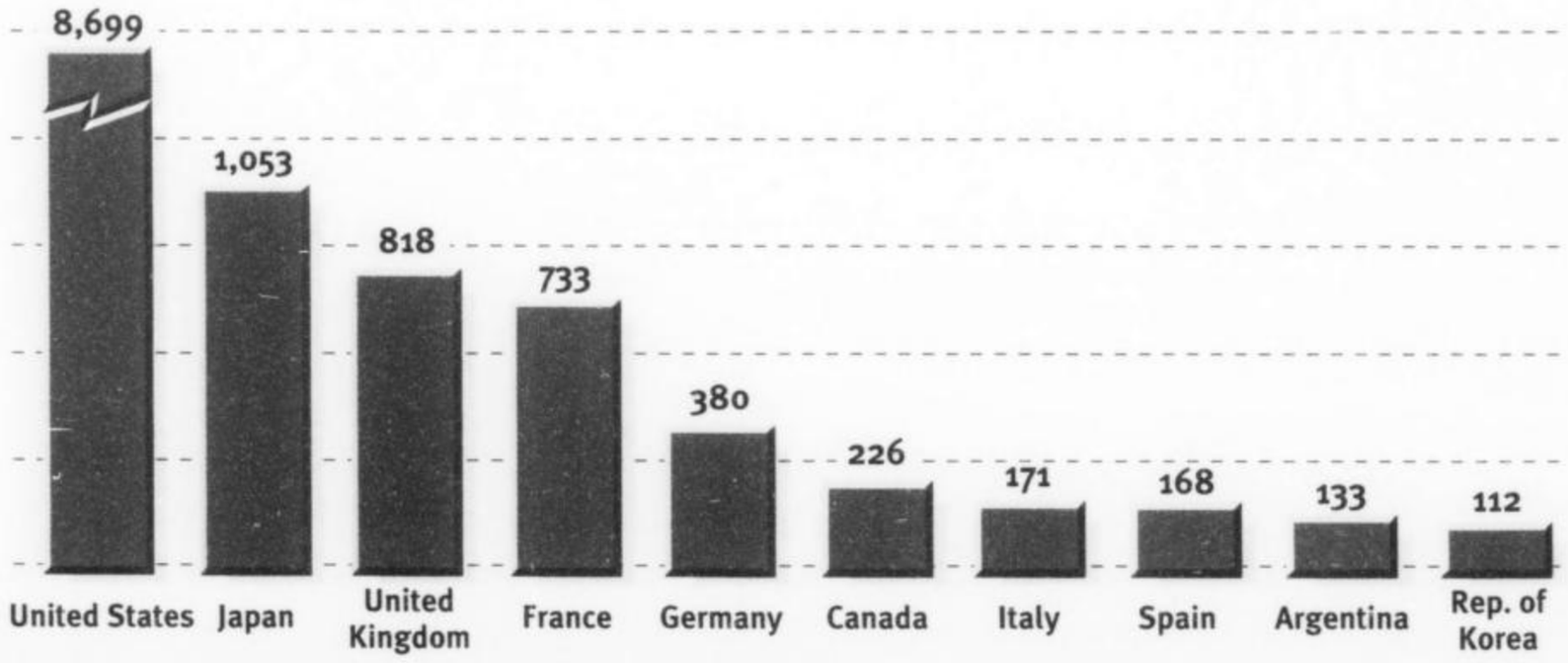
Among the world's top ten producers, India and the U.S. are neck-to-neck. The European Union ranks third with 706 feature-length films produced in 1999, however it has captured only three per cent of the U.S. market. American films compose roughly half the market in nine out of the ten leading movie-producing countries and territories in the world.



Source: Screen Digest (contact: David.Hancock@screendigest.com)

Investment

The U.S. alone invests more in the film industry than any other country for which statistics are available. The second in line is the European Union, with a total investment of $2,559 million in 1999.

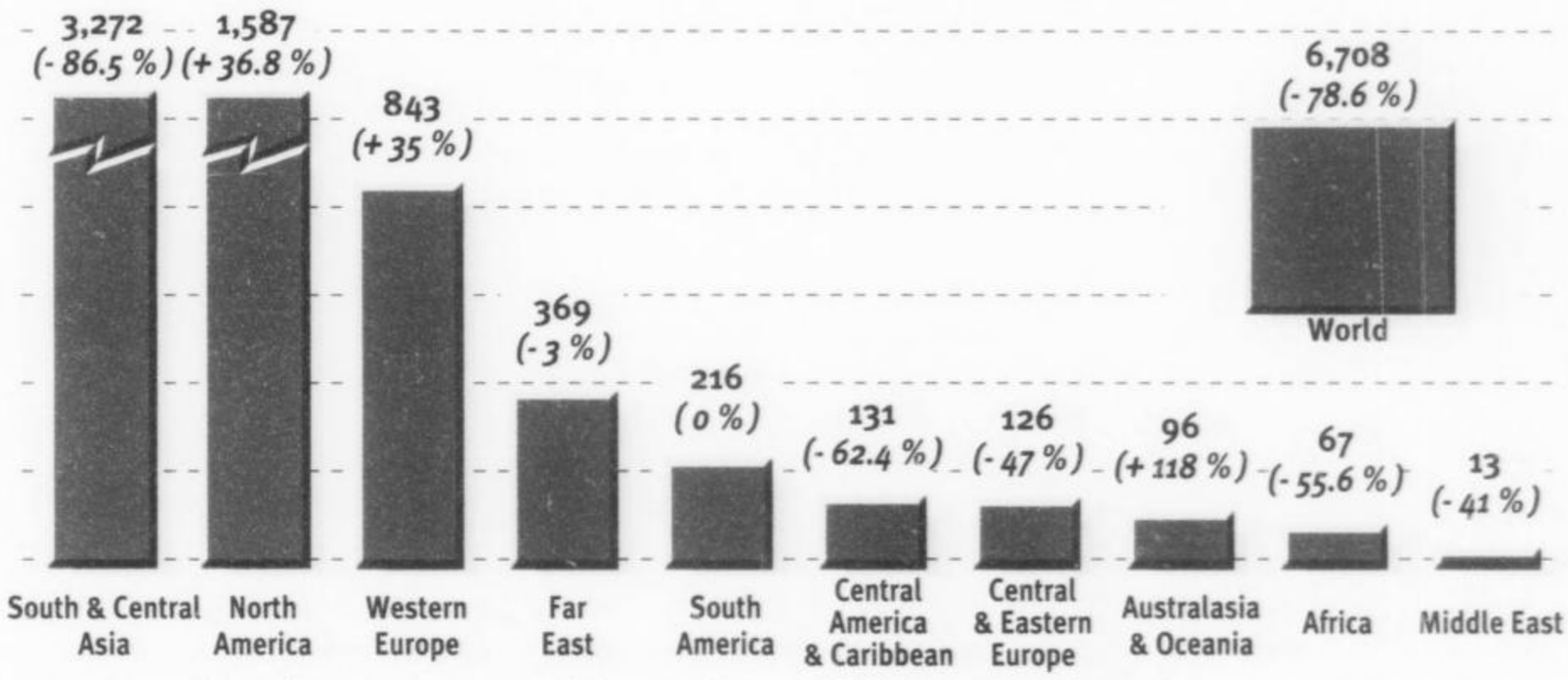


Source: Screen Digest (contact: David.Hancock@screendigest.com)

dwarves

ADMISSIONS

Admissions (per million population) have followed the same pattern as the number of screens (see below). The only regions to witness an increase are North America and the Australia/New Zealand/Pacific Islands region. Between 1988 and 1998, the annual number of movie-goers fell to less than a seventh of what it used to be in Central and South Asia, largely because of an explosion in the production of pirate videos. In Central and Eastern Europe, the situation is even worse: admissions have fallen by more than 33 times following the disentegration of state-run film industries.

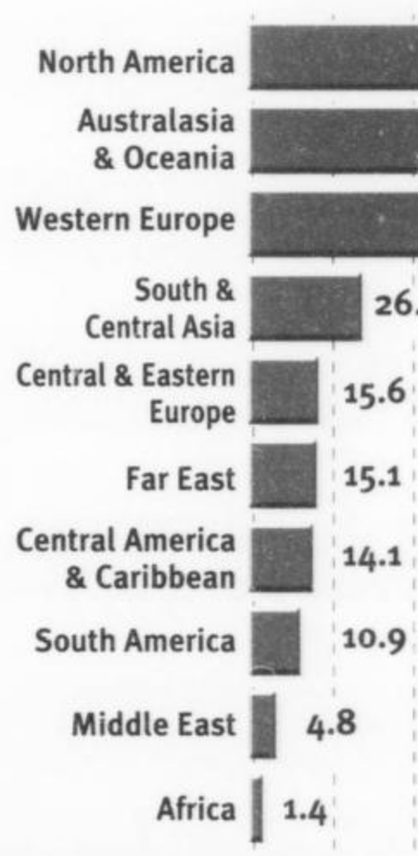


Sources: Screen Digest (contact: David.Hancock@screendigest.com); UNESCO Institute for Statistics.

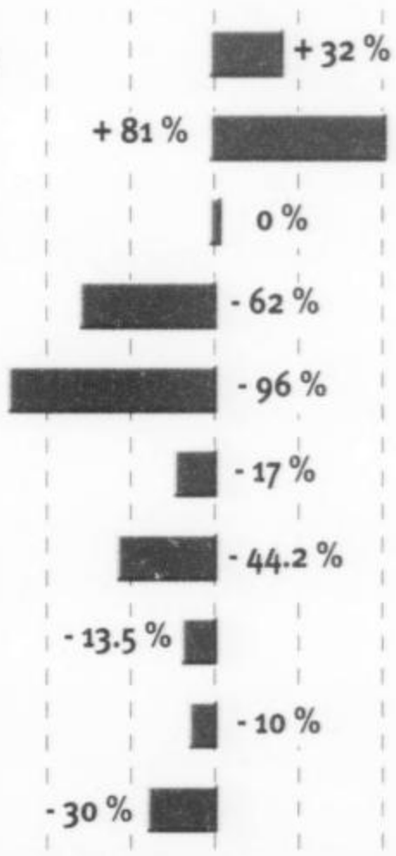
SCREENS

In North America and the region of Australia/New Zealand/Pacific Islands, the number of screens per million population is on the rise. A steady decline, however, has been recorded in Central and South Asia (the world's most populous region) as well as in Central America/the Caribbean. Meanwhile the number of screens operating in Central and Eastern Europe has plummeted. The situation elsewhere remains stable.

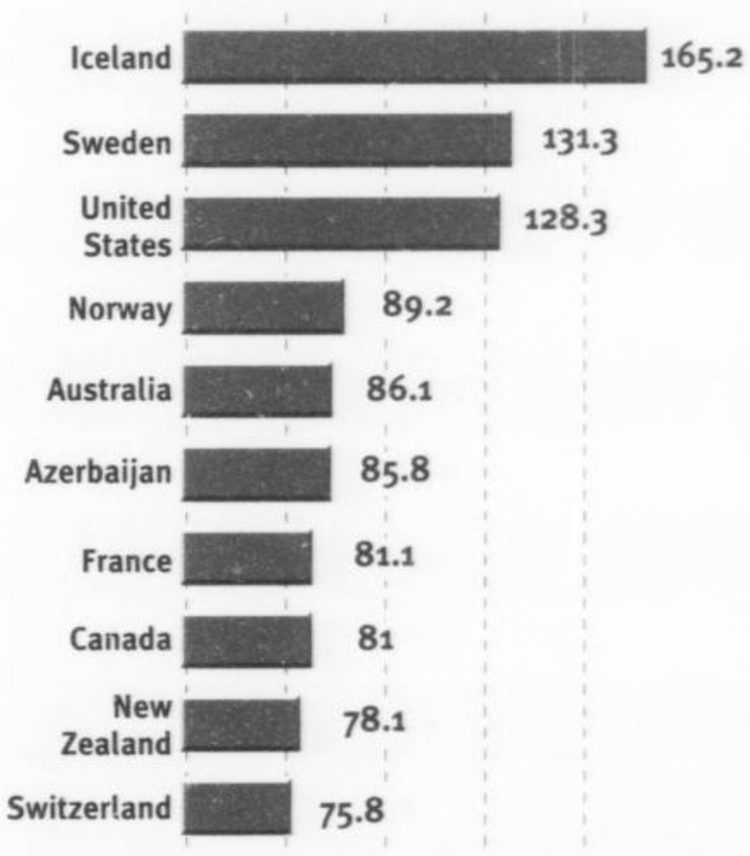
Cinema screens in the world's regions per million population in 1998



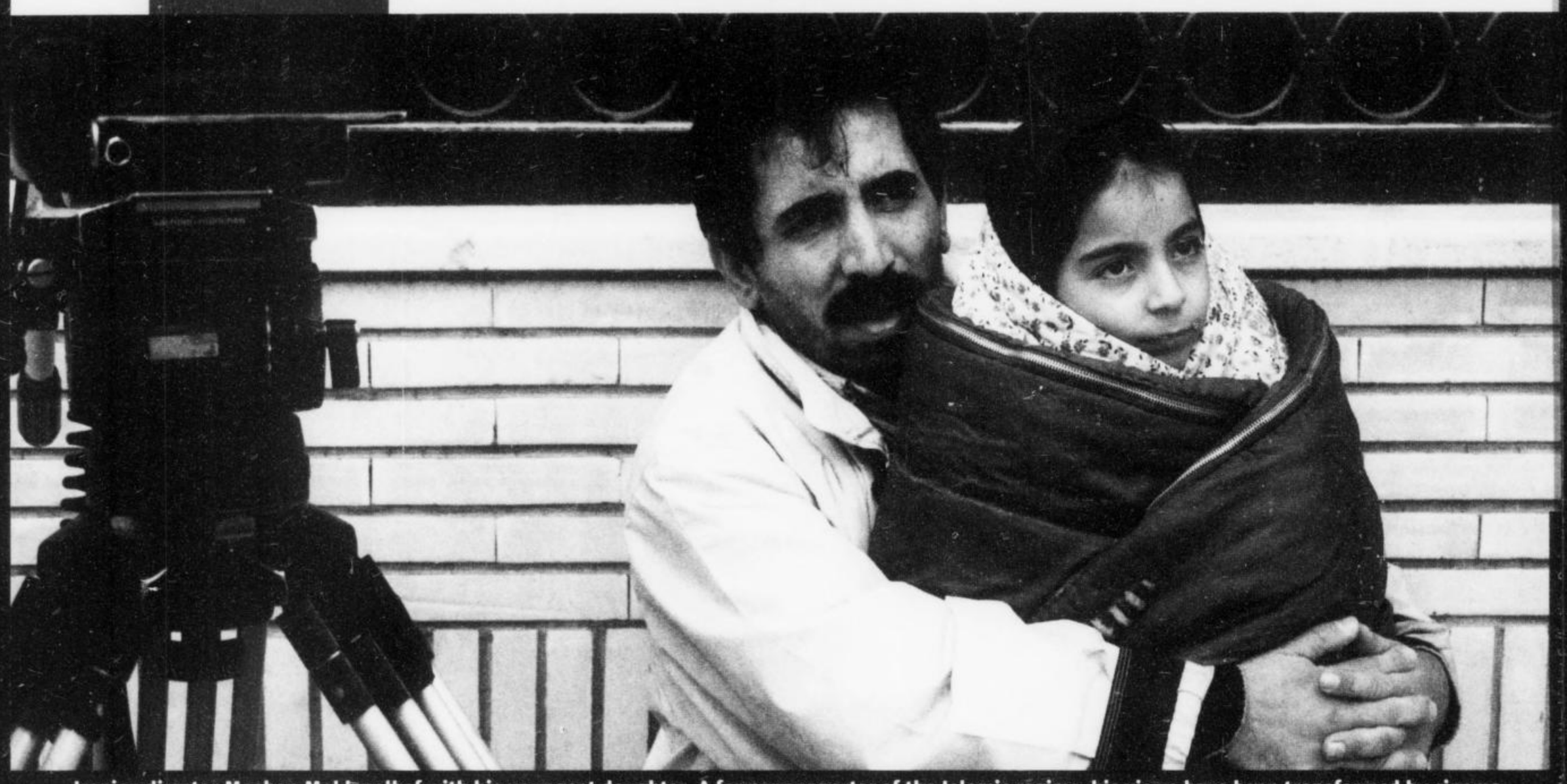
% Comparison with 1988



The number of cinema screens in each country per million population in 1998



Source: Screen Digest (contact: David.Hancock@screendigest.com)



Iranian director Moshen Makhmalbaf with his youngest daughter. A former supporter of the Islamic regime, his views have been transformed by cinema.

After the revolution: the cinema will carry us

Cinema was authorized by the Islamic Republic for propaganda purposes, but a new generation of directors is offering the world a very different image of Iran

MAMAD HAGHIGHAT

IRANIAN FILM CRITIC AND HISTORIAN, AUTHOR OF *HISTOIRE DU CINÉMA IRANIEN*, ("A HISTORY OF IRANIAN CINEMA"), PUBLISHED BY THE GEORGE POMPIDOU CENTRE IN 1999

In Iran, cinema did not become legitimate (in the eyes of believers) until the revolution of February 1979. Before that political upheaval, which stemmed from widespread dissatisfaction with the Shah's regime and resulted in an "Islamic Republic" headed by Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, the seventh art had drawn thundering condemnation from the clergy.

Movies first appeared in Iran at the start of the twentieth century, and Muslim clerics voiced their opposition to the new art form as soon as the first theatres opened in Tehran in 1904. Several cinemas were burned down, with sometimes tragic consequences: in August 1978, 400 people lost their lives at the Rex in the city of Abadan. Mullahs believed the movie theatre to be a symbol of the godless West and a competitor to the mosque, thus making it a direct threat to their power. Furthermore, movies were considered blasphemous because they featured images of women without veils and, later, scenes of dancing accompanied by music.

Fanatical believers could not tolerate the iconographical portrayal of humans: God alone is the "Creator" and the "Craftsman" of living beings. Mosque decorations, especially in Iran, contain no figurative representations, and for centuries the power of words dominated Iranian society. Without any tradition of visual artistic expression (with the exception of miniatures in the 14th and 15th centuries), "imaginative" representation became the domain of writers and, above all, poets.

Between 1930 and 1979, approximately 1,100 feature films were shown in 420 theatres, but not one of them met with the ayatollahs' approval. Rigidly

Muslim parents even beat their children for going to the movies. But when Khomeini took power, a strange reversal occurred. Overnight, the cinema became of interest to everybody, including the clerics. As in other areas, the new regime took control of everything. It confiscated images and made its own visual style omnipresent on television, in newspapers, on walls and in movie theatres. The blessed and purified seventh art had won its legitimacy, though foreign cinema, which flies in the face of Islamic values, was banned. As a result, the national film industry had no competitors on Iranian soil.

During his exile in France, Ayatollah Khomeini had become aware of the image's role as an effective political propaganda tool. Back in Tehran, he saw Dariush Mehrjui's film *The Cow* (1969) on television. The film, with a style close to realism, focuses on the troubled lives of impoverished farmers in a remote village, where one character identifies with his dead cow, the only property he owns. This movie inspired the religious leader to make a speech on the educational role of film.

Setting the wheels of dissent in motion

As early as the first year of the revolution, all parts of the state worked hard to create an "Islamic cinema" that would move in "the right direction." At the very same time, a rival style of cinema, drawing on the tradition of high-quality filmmaking from before 1979, was also born. A few filmmakers managed to create a language that skirted around the relentless censorship, drawing inspiration from everyday life (through a fusion between documentary and fiction) and from Persian poetry. The freshness and innocence of their films struck a chord with the public. The film directors also learned to play one state body against another, especially as the various appoined officials changed position frequently.

The new cinema's leading representative, Abbas Kiarostami, who also co-founded the filmmaking department at the Institute for the Intellectual Development of Children and Young Adults in 1969, uses his camera to challenge Khomeini's cinematic precepts. As Iran and Iraq braced for a particularly murderous war (1980-1988), the new regime, after just a few months of nascent democracy, took a much harder line. In this grim context, Abbas Kiarostami made at the end of 1979 *Alternative 1, Alternative 2*, an indictment of informers that lays bare the ineptitude of various social classes, including the clergy. The movie was banned and never approved for release. But Kiarostami, who says that he is a secular director, had set the wheels in motion of a form of filmmaking that would prove a formidable adversary to the regime.

Kiarostami's films criticized the mullahs' hold over society. In *Homework* (1990), he attacked the brainwashing of children. Then, with *Taste of Cherry* (1997), he focused on suicide, which is against Islamic law, and whose causes must be sought in people's despair over Iran's rigid social structures. Another barrier fell with *The Wind Will Carry Us* (1999), which casts doubt on the existence of an after-life.

Kiarostami is not the only director to have challenged Iranian society. In *Bashu, The Little Stranger* (1987), Bahram Beyzaï condemned the terrible consequences of the holy war against Iraq. So did Mohsen Makhmalbaf in *Marriage of the Blessed* (1989). Amir Naderi focused on the authorities' attitude towards soldiers missing-in-action at the beginning of the war, which he gave an alternative account of in the as yet unreleased *Search 2*. With *The Runner* (1985), Naderi became the first director since the revolution to give leading parts to children, who went on to become some of Iran's most popular movie "actors".

This is noteworthy because Iran is undergoing a demographic boom. The population has nearly doubled in the past 20 years, and almost half of all Iranians are under 20. Film directors noticed that the authorities were failing to take these figures seriously, and—drawing on the saying that words of truth come from the mouths of babes—they cast children to explore facets of everyday life.

From a whimsical cinematic style partly based on Egyptian and Indian B-movies, Iranian films made the transition to something between "Italian neo-realism" and "French new wave," shattering taboos and washing Iran's dirty laundry in public. Worst of all in the mullahs' eyes, this new cinema captured the imagination and the talent of the regime's apologists. The most stunning example of this is Mohsen Makhmalbaf. A pure product of the protests that marked the end of the Shah's rule, he spent four years in jail before being released in 1979. He was fully committed to the new regime and directed the Islamic Artistic Theatre Centre, a propaganda organization, before gradually moving towards cinema. With the complete trust of the authorities, he then directed *The Peddler* (1987), which caused a sensation by openly criticizing the regime and denouncing the "lies of the mosque." When journalists asked him, "Makhmalbaf, what have you become? Are you stepping out of line?" he replied, "I've discovered cinema, and it has changed the way I look at the world."

On a trip to Europe, Makhmalbaf was so deeply moved by Wim Wenders' *Wings of Desire* that he made blasphemous remarks on his return to Iran. "If God must send a new prophet, his name will be Wim Wenders," he declared. He then made a film

TO KNOW MORE

WORLD PRODUCTION RANK
1999: 13

LOCAL FILMS' SHARE OF DOMESTIC BOX-OFFICE
1998: 95%

NUMBER OF FILMS PRODUCED

POPULATION (millions)
1988: 51.9
1998: 65.8

NUMBER OF SCREENS
1988: 279
1998: 285

Data for cinema admissions and total film production investment are not available.

Sources: Screen Digest (*contact: David Hancock@screendigest.com*) and Unesco Institute for Statistics.

2. NEW WAVES

challenging the dogma of Islamic society, *Time of Love* (1990), about an affair between a married woman and her lover. Contrary to all expectations, the movie was shown at the Tehran film festival the same year, where it drew huge crowds in just a few screenings (though it was not cleared for general release). That event, in part, cost Makhmalbaf his position at the Ministry of Culture, which at the time was headed by none other than the current president, Mohammad Khatami.

The 1990s marked a turning point. The West was surprised to discover a different Iran at film festivals, with Iranian movies addressing themes such as friendship, tolerance and togetherness. A time of honours and awards had begun. "Once, Iran exported oil, rugs and pistachios. Now it can add movies to the list. Iran exports its culture, which is a good thing," said Kiarostami, who won the 1997 Golden Palm at Cannes for *Taste of Cherry*. In 2000, three Iranian filmmakers won prizes at Cannes, including Makhmalbaf's 20-year-old daughter, Samira, the youngest award-winner in the festival's history, for *Blackboards*. Bahman Ghobadi, meanwhile, won the Golden Camera award for *A Time for Drunken Horses* and Hassan Yektapanah for *Djomeh*.

Iran is a veritable breeding ground for fresh cinematic talent. Today, around 20 gifted directors, including Kiarostami, Makhmalbaf, Jalili, Mehrjui, Beyzaï, Forozesh, Naderi and Panahi, make 15 per cent of the 60 films that the country produces each year. The limits of this cinema, which is shattering the last taboos, are still unknown.

For the first time, a feature film, *The Circle*, which reaped the Golden Lion at the 2000 Venice Film Festival, deals with prostitution, a topic that had previously been totally off-limits in the Islamic republic. Forty-year-old Jafar Panahi, who had already won the Golden Camera award at Cannes in 1995 for *The White Balloon*, made this outstanding film without even submitting the script to Iran's censorship committee. A willingness to test the regime's limits can also be witnessed among writers and journalists, some of whom were killed or imprisoned in 1999. Arrests have continued since the beginning of the year.

Female directors have encountered even more hurdles, but they too have found a place behind the camera in making films about the condition of women. For example, Rakhshan Banni-Etemad, Tahminé Milani and a dozen or so others are making names for themselves in Iran's "macho-Islamic" society. Young Iranian exiles who studied in the West are also going back home, bringing a different vision of Iran with them. For example Babak Payami, who directed the remarkable *A Day More*, a film about love, lived in Canada.

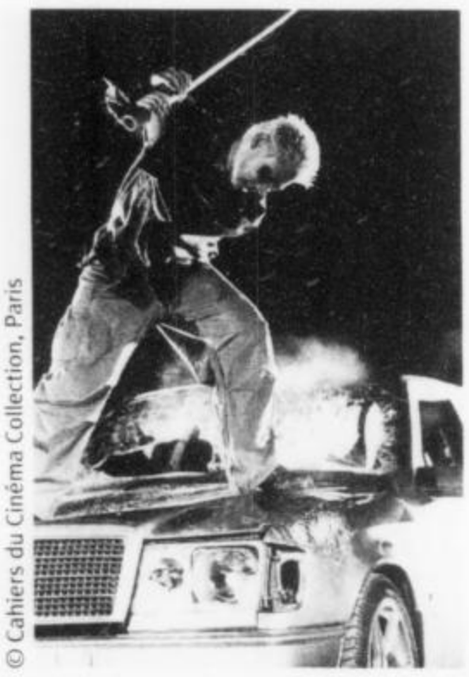
Iran has adopted the modern imagery coined by films. Whether in documentary or fiction, Iranian cinema has liberated itself and become part of people's day-to-day lives. All Iranians are now spellbound by images, "whether it is a just image or just an image," to borrow the expression of French director Jean-Luc Godard. ■

Shooting on a shoestring

Young Japanese producers are stretching tight budgets to produce a wave of often dark films while the big studios, fattened by prosperity, are falling on hard times

BRICE PEDROLETTI

FRENCH JOURNALIST BASED IN TOKYO



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The tiny bar in Tokyo's Shinjuku district has barely changed over the past 50 years. Its owner keeps a careful eye on the rows of whisky bottles that line the ancient dive's walls, each bottle bearing the name of a filmmaker from somewhere across the world. Every time one of these illustrious guests passes through Tokyo, they find their private bottle waiting, intact.

For Masaki Tamura, a famous director of photography who worked with the big names in documentary and fiction films in the 1970s and 1980s, the bar is a favourite hangout when taking a break between two shoots. One day in the early 1990s, however, in the middle of a shoot with a famous director, Tamura's patience with movie-making finally broke. "I was sick of the old methods. The approach was too conventional. I wanted to give up film and I didn't work for the next three years. I thought it was all over for me."

That is until he met Shinji Aoyama and did camera work for his first film, *Helpless*. "During the shoot, everybody knew how to do everyone else's job," he says. "You had to because the budget was so small. It was a miracle how we managed to make a three-hour film in cinemascope with so little money."

At 61, with a moustache, shock of grey hair, sensitive face and calm voice of a character from a Yasujiro Ozu film, Tomura describes his new career as a conversion. "At first, I didn't understand the film language these young people used. The way they worked was new to me. Ideas come from all sides. Everyone has

Shinya Tsukamoto's *Bullet Ballet*: a tough look at Japanese youth.

© Cahiers du Cinéma Collection, Paris

something to say and we discuss everything together. But I got used to it and now I speak that language." For the past five years, Tamura has been working exclusively with this young generation, whose creative energy has given new life to Japan's battered film industry.

These filmmakers are all between 20 and 40 years old, and produce their films with extremely limited resources in the world's most expensive city. Some of them have worked in television, advertising or cartoons, and hold down several jobs to make ends meet. They tend to focus on social and psychological themes, like delinquency and mindless crime, which mirror the confusion and malaise of a generation that has rejected the old ambitions of getting rich, blind loyalty to one's employer and social harmony.

Without access to major distribution networks, they make do in a ghetto of art cinemas where competition is fierce: this new genre can never earn much money. Financing the productions is also a nightmare, with budgets ranging from $100,000 to a million dollars. Most do not even have an inter-negative version (from which copies can be made without damaging the master)—a common sacrifice made by makers of short films elsewhere.

"I often have to go into debt to get the film started," says Shinya Tsukamoto. "You start shooting with the crew working for nothing and hoping to get paid later. Then I show the rushes to video editors to try to get them to invest in the film." Making fantasy films in the tradition of the Frenchman Georges Méliès, Tsukamoto is a director, cameraman, set-designer, actor and producer all rolled into one.

At 40, he has made six films independently and another two for the big studios. It took eight months to make *Bullet Ballet*, his seventh and second-to-last film, whose street scenes were largely shot clandestinely. Like his first films, *Tetsuo* and *Tokyo First*, *Bullet Ballet* conveys the vibrant energy of its director, who depicts the fragile equilibrium of young people living on the brink of disaster, in a culture of violence from which there is no return.

Just as in the 1970s, when major studios such as Nikkatsu switched to B movies and the soft porn works on which many filmmakers cut their teeth, today's producers have made erotic films (*pinku eiga*) and gangster films on budgets even smaller than their elders. These video or 16mm productions are targetted directly at the video market.

Kiyoshi Kurosawa continues to make film noir on 16mm for video, though he infuses his creations with a surprisingly philosophical dimension. The two major works of the *Revenge II* series, *Eyes of the Spider* and *Serpent Path* (1998), were shot one after the other, each in two weeks, with the same crew and the same actors. The same plot of revenge, however, is handled very differently in the two cases. "I don't mind shooting like this," he says. "In fact it's a luxury to be able to make two versions of the same story." Takashi Miike, king of gangster gore films, agrees.

Takeshi Kitano, big brother to this new generation of filmmakers, started out in a similar fashion. It was too hard being an actor and producer at the same time, so he went behind the camera. Today his company Office Kitano turns out a steady stream of independent films, though he makes most of his money by selling to television.

Never before has a "new wave" in Japanese cinema made such a virtue out of necessity. The current generation has set up its own makeshift network with a freedom unprecedented in the history of the nation's film industry. The French "new wave" of the 1960s had little choice but to depend heavily on big studio money. So long as the films drew the crowds, independent filmmakers and the studio bosses always found a way of working together.

There is no such thing as national cinema, only individual filmmakers.
Youssef Chahine, Egyptian film director (1926-)

2. NEW WAVES

Shinji Aoyama's *Eureka*, an emblem for Japan's new directors.

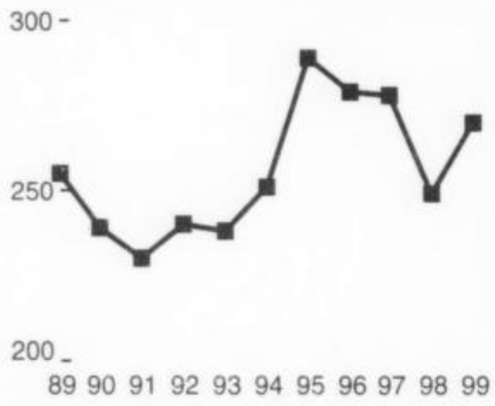
D.R

TO KNOW MORE

WORLD PRODUCTION RANK
1999: 3

LOCAL FILMS' SHARE OF DOMESTIC BOX-OFFICE
1998: 32%

NUMBER OF FILMS PRODUCED



TOTAL POPULATION (millions)
1988: 122.6
1998: 126.3

NUMBER OF SCREENS
1988: 2005
1998: 1993

CINEMA ADMISSIONS (millions)
1988: 144.80
1998: 153.10

TOTAL FILM PRODUCTION INVESTMENT (US$m)
1999: 1053.16

Sources: Screen Digest (*contact: David Hancock@screendigest.com*) and UNESCO Institute for Statistics.

But falling attendance rates combined with an economic downturn has dealt a sharp blow to the Japanese industry. The major distributors—Toho, Toei and Shochiko—have brushed aside the newcomers and made money by filling their cinemas with foreign films (70 per cent of total revenue), animation (about 20 such films were made in 1999) or their own productions.

As a result, the "new wave" of the 1990s had to set up shop, physically and figuratively, in a country where training had long been the preserve of big studios. New film and video schools are springing up like Eiga Bi Gakko, which was founded two years ago by producer Kenzo Horikoshi. Classes are often taught by young directors, who submit film proposals as part of the school programme to produce two films each year. Akihiko Shiota made a couple of erotic films before his remarkable *Moonlight Whispers* in 1999, which follows three children growing up in a city suburb and cost less than $200,000.

"The films are made without any thought of the big studio network," says Hirokazu Kore-Eda, who directed *Wonderful Life*. Because they owe favours to no-one, the young directors are totally free to experiment. For *Wonderful Life*, Kore-Eda, who was trained in documentary production, sent his assistants out on a five-month mission to capture on video "the best memories" of about 500 elderly people. He looked at the rushes, did the casting and then contacted those he had chosen to appear in the film.

Nobuhiro Suwa, director of *M/Other*, developed in three feature-length films a very personal style based on improvisation and lengthy shots, some of which last over five minutes. *H story*, his third film, is the story of the filming of an imaginary re-make of *Hiroshima Mon Amour*, in which Béatrice Dalle plays the original star, Emmanuelle Riva.

As for Aoyama, his feature film *Eureka* deals with a recurrent theme in 1990s Japanese cinema—that of a new life, a transition to an alternative state of existence following a traumatic experience. It shows three people, a man and two children, who have escaped from a bloody hostage-taking episode and struggle throughout the film to find their way out of a maze of misfortune.

New outfits upstage the big studios

The technical, stylistic and narrative maturity of *Eureka*, made in black and white cinemascope, stands out among other independent films which, despite all their energy, sometimes seem laborious productions overly concerned with navel-gazing and experimentation. It is perhaps no accident that the film was one of the first produced by Suncent Cinema Works, the new company of Takenori Sentoh. The 38-year-old producer is seen by many as a pioneer of new Japanese cinema. In 1992, he joined the pay-TV channel Wowow and gave several beginners their first break, including Aoyama for *Helpless*. Since then, Sentoh has produced more than 35 films for Wowow and others companies, including some festival favourites of recent years. In 1999, he set up his own production company, Suncent.

Distribution is still very difficult in Japan, but Sentoh's success abroad and Kitano's commercial breakthrough have encouraged other centres of independent film production, including, ironically, the former major distributors Daiei and Nikkatsu. Some previously occasional partners of the new Japanese cinema (video editors, advertising agencies and radio and television stations) are now more involved in co-production, while countless multimedia firms (Little More, Uplink and Gaga, for example) are encouraging alternative productions.

Meanwhile the disintegration of the big-studio system is gathering pace. An almost-bankrupt Shochiku has sold its studios at Ofuna, near Tokyo. "This reminds me of the *gekokujo*," says the head of a film school, referring to 15th and 16th century feudal Japan when the serfs took the place of the gentry. Sentoh for his part has started hiring banking executives and others totally alien to the film industry on the condition that they are true film fanatics. He has always wondered, he says, "if anyone in the mainstream Japanese movie industry even likes cinema." ■

South Korea: freedom or love?

The advent of democracy in South Korea and efforts to defend local film production against U.S. competition have spawned a new generation of filmmakers who are winning plaudits at home and abroad

I MYUNG-HEE

South Korean journalist based in Paris and consultant for several film festivals

Seom by Ki-duk, one of the leading lights of this new generation.

D.R

South Korea's filmmakers are in a recalcitrant mood. They are battling the American juggernaut in its effort to lift a local quota on importing foreign films, but these militants don't have their backs to the wall: the general public shares the country's new cultural exuberance, and is backing its young directors. "Our young filmmakers are to be congratulated on the breadth of their imagination and their box-office successes," says 58-year-old Lee Doo-yong, who has made more than 50 films. "They know what they want to say. That's something new round here."

The South Korean film industry is doing extremely well. It conquered 37 per cent of the domestic market in 1999 (up from 25 per cent the previous year and 18 per cent in 1997), a total boosted by a record 6.5 million people who went to see the film *Shiri* (Titanic only managed a local audience of 4.3 million).

With this windfall, the man who made the film, Kang Je-gyu, decided to join forces with young filmmakers, revamp the distribution network and lay the groundwork for cooperation between Asian countries. New film companies (Sidus, Cinema Service, Myung Film, East Film, Bom) are also zeroing in on young directors just starting out. Serious money from the likes of Mirae Esset, Unikorea, CJ Entertainment and National Technology Finance is filling the gap left by the big industrial conglomerates, the chaebol, which pulled out of film financing during the 1997-98 Asian financial crisis.

It was in the midst of the economic downturn that the United States chose to attack the system of quotas in place since 1985. The main feature of these, one which ensured the industry's prosperity, stipulated that Korean films should be shown in cinemas for between 100 and 146 days a year. But the reaction from South Korean professionals, backed by France, stopped the U.S. campaign in its tracks.

Despite a drop in the number of productions caused by the economic crisis, 18 films by first-time directors (out of a total of 43 new films) were made in 1999 and seven of the year's 10 most popular films were debuts. In 1999, 22 such first films and 10 second features by new directors were made out of a total of 53 releases, at an average cost of about $1.5 million each.

The rise of this new cinema dates back to the late 1980s, at the end of years of authoritarian political rule that began in 1961 with the long dictatorships of Park Chung-hee and then Chun Doo-hwan. In the period leading to 1971, the South Korean film industry had also prospered, turning out some 200 films a year despite the military regime and the distorting effects of the Cold War, which partly paralyzed cultural life. Society was by then modernizing at lightning speed, and films mirrored the social and political ferment that resulted.

Ha Kil-jong's 1975 film *Parade of Fools*, a favourite of the new wave, came to symbolize this

2. NEW WAVES

period. With a final scene that is still tremendously moving, the film has become an icon for young directors, inspiring the landmark film of the Korean new wave, Lee Jang-ho's *Declaration of Fools* (1983). Kil-jong's film depicts a nation's youth that is innocent and full of dreams but shaken by the political situation, a youth longing for freedom and democracy. "The entire South Korean film industry suffered from crippling censorship," Lee Doo-yong says. "In 1980, in front of my very eyes, a minor official clipped out half an hour's worth of negatives from my film *The Last Eyewitness*, which I was particularly fond of. What an incredible waste of creative work! I even considered giving up film altogether."

After filmmaking restrictions were lifted in 1985 and script censorship abolished in 1987, a fresh new cinema appeared around 1988. Park Kwang-su's *A Single Spark* (1996) and Jang Sun-woo's *A Petal* (1996), films made by two veterans of this new wave, marked a peak of public interest in liberated political cinema. The two films dealt with a couple of key events which had long been taboo: the banning of the trade union movement and the massacre at Kwang-ju in 1980, when 2,000 people died according to witnesses but only 200 according to the Chun Doo-hwan regime. Public support for the films was proof of the new cinema's vigour.

The impact of the jointly-made *The Night Before the Strike* (1990) was just as significant for the then bold and militant independent cinema. To watch this aesthetically unimpressive film in the only place it could be seen, a university campus, it was best to wear training shoes and know how to run. On one occasion 1,700 police plus a helicopter turned up to seize a copy of the film. In all, a million young people saw it even though it was officially banned.

The film's producers and directors, like several others—such as Lee Eun, Lee Yong-bae, Chang Dong-hong and Jang Yun-hyun, along with the critic Lee Yong-kwan—advocated links between the film world and the working class. Today, they hold important posts in bodies such as the KOFIC, set up to encourage film creativity on the model of France's National Film Centre, the CNC.

Sopyonje set off another revolution in 1993 by drawing many more people to the cinema. Through a melancholy paean to the disappearing art of traditional singing, veteran director Im Kwon-taek, who already has 90 films under his belt, took a new look at the nation's painful course since the Japanese occupation. This journey through cultural history sent a shockwave through audiences. More than a million people went to see it, beating all records and overshadowing local box office interest in Steven Spielberg's *Jurassic Park*.

The enthusiasm for Korean-made films has continued. Cinema audiences keep on growing and films by first-time directors often draw more than a million people. But public interest has shifted, with young people between 17 and 25—who make up the majority of cinema-goers—becoming the key to commercial success.

A landmark for Korean culture

Yet the film industry's new vitality, along with the growing role of big investors, has not helped all directors. *Chunhyang*, Im Kwon-taek's latest work, which in 2000 became the first Korean film to be officially presented at the Cannes festival, was a box-office flop. The generation of directors aged over 50—Lee Doo-yong, who made *L'Amour* (1999), and Bae Chang-ho, director of *The Heart* (1998)—is having big problems making small-budget independent films. Even the granddaddy of the industry, 75-year-old Sin Sang-ok, cannot complete his film *The Visit*, the tale of a father who discovers his daughter working as a bar hostess in Seoul, illustrating the conflict between tradition and the thrusting materialism of today.

The times clearly favour young filmmakers inspired by Hollywood formulas and video-game scripts, but independent cinema has not given up yet. Since the arrival of democracy, it has simply changed its slogans. Instead of "Freedom or death!" it now proclaims, as if in reference to the French surrealist poet Robert Desnos, "Freedom or love!"

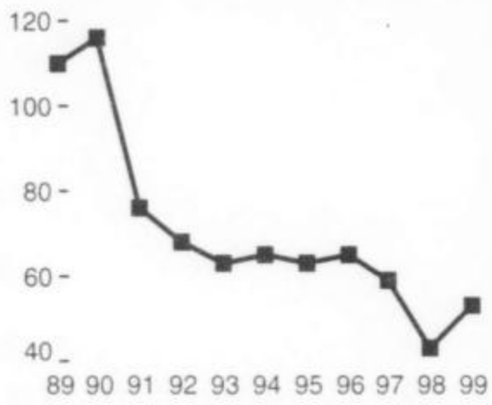
Films made by this school, such as *Spring in My Hometown* (1998) by Lee Kwang-mo, *Peppermint Candy* (1999) by Lee Chang-dong, *Christmas in August* (1998) by Huh Jing-ho and *The Spy* (1999) by Jang Jin, have spread abroad. The best-known director among them, Hong Sang-su, who made *The Day the Pig Fell Into the Well* in 1996, is optimistic. "I think Korean cinema will stay very interesting for another decade at least," he says, pointing out that cinema courses in universities draw talented students, that many short films are getting shown and that movie websites are proliferating. "The cinema is going to become the main landmark for Korean culture in all its diversity," he says. "And that's exciting." The release in September of young director Park Chan-ook's new film *Joint Security Area*, with ticket sales of a million in its first three days, shows that the issue of reconciliation with North Korea has generated even more powerful subject matter. ■

TO KNOW MORE

WORLD PRODUCTION RANK
1999: 14

LOCAL FILMS' SHARE OF DOMESTIC BOX-OFFICE
1998: 25%

NUMBER OF FILMS PRODUCED



TOTAL POPULATION (millions)
1988: 42
1998: 46.1

NUMBER OF SCREENS
1988: 696
1999: 528

CINEMA ADMISSIONS (millions)
1988: 52.20
1998: 45.76

TOTAL FILM PRODUCTION INVESTMENT (US$m)
1999: 111.73

Sources: Screen Digest (*contact: David Hancock@screendigest.com*)

Neo-realism is a moral perspective on the world. Roberto Rossellini, Italian film director (1906-1977)

The Chinese conundrum

Chinese-language films and directors have flourished in recent years even as they struggle at home against censorship and public indifference

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Yi Yi, by Taiwanese director Edward Yang, reveals the gulf between the old and the new.

BY JACOB WONG

HEAD OF ASIAN CINEMA PROGRAMMING FOR THE HONG KONG INTERNATIONAL FILM FESTIVAL FROM 1997 TO 2000

If garnering awards at major film festivals like Cannes is a sign of good health, then Chinese films, or more accurately Chinese-language films, are doing splendidly. Mainland China, Taiwan and Hong Kong each had a film that picked up honours at the last Cannes festival—Jiang Wen's *Devils on the Doorstep*, Edward Yang's *Yi Yi* and Wong Kai-wai's *In the Mood of Love* respectively—while Ang Lee's out-of-competition *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* was a hit among festival-goers.

Unlike the more mainstream *Crouching Tiger*, however, the other three films have not been released on home ground. *Devils on the Doorstep*, which invited the wrath of China's Film Bureau by travelling overseas without going through the proper channels, probably needs to clear a few hurdles before it can see the light of day. In the cases of *Yi Yi* and *In the Mood of Love*, the reasons are commercial: neither film is expected to do well at the box-office, and distributors are moving cautiously. Strangely, the soils that produce these films do not seem particularly congenial to serious cinema. Scrutiny of these movies' financing in fact reveals that apart from *Devils*, all are international co-productions.

The People's Republic to this day keeps a tight rein over filmmaking and parrots the dogma "cinema must serve the people." But this constraint has been perversely undermined by modern China's obsession with its historical destiny. "Fifth Generation" filmmakers such as Chen Kaige and Zhang Yimou portray China's past, and are faithful to the dictums of 1930s "progressive" Chinese cinema in using history to dissect the failings of the present. But "Sixth Generation" filmmakers, who arrived on the scene in the aftermath of the 1989 Tiananmen uprising, trumpet a very different sense of aesthetics. Working without official approval, early films like Zhang Yuan's *Mama* (1991) and He Jianjun's *Red Beads* (1993) seethe with inwardly directed rage, capturing the fatalism of post-1989 society. Allegories based on madness, dysfunctional families and above all alienation are major themes. For these independents, the biggest headache is seeing their films scoop up awards on the festival circuit while remaining largely unseen in China itself.

The two currents—historical and contemporary—look set to join in Jia Zhangke's new film *Platform*. A richly layered work, it observes the lives of young people in a provincial music troupe as they fall in love and are hurtled into the vast unknown of China's modernization. Over three hours long but with less than a hundred shots, the film is unprecedented in mainland Chinese cinema.

Taiwanese films, meanwhile, have won international recognition even though the island's film industry has been in decline, with annual output dwindling to 20 films and funding coming from the government or abroad. Yet Taiwan still manages to produce some of the world's best filmmakers, including Hou Hsiao-hsien, Edward Yang, Tsai Ming-liang and Ang Lee—a film-maker with stronger mass appeal than his peers and a track record in light comedy (*Eat Drink Man Woman*), adaptations of classic novels (*Sense and Sensibility*) and, with *Crouching Tiger*, old-school swordplay.

Similar financial concerns abound in Hong Kong, home to headline-grabbing art-house

TO KNOW MORE

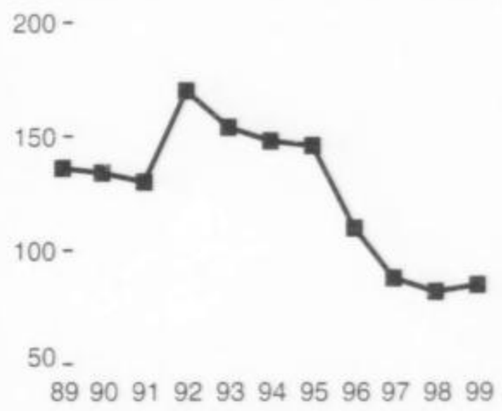
WORLD PRODUCTION RANK (CHINA)

1999:	10

LOCAL FILMS' SHARE OF DOMESTIC BOX-OFFICE

1998:	n.a.

NUMBER OF FILMS PRODUCED



TOTAL POPULATION (millions)

1988:	1,121.9

NUMBER OF SCREENS

1988:	161,777
1998:	65,000

CINEMA ADMISSIONS (millions)

1988:	18,730
1998:	121

TOTAL FILM PRODUCTION INVESTMENT (US$m)

1999:	34.7

Sources: Screen Digest (*contact: David Hancock@screendigest.com*) and UNESCO Institute for Statistics.

2. NEW WAVES

DON'T BLINK NOW, IT'S KAZAKHSTAN

The Kazakh film industry was a ship in the night. It raised a few hopes, but now it's vanishing.

At the end of the 1980s, cinema was the first cultural activity in Kazakhstan to feel the currents of freedom that Mikhail Gorbachev's policy of perestroika had unleashed. A dozen young filmmakers who had trained at Moscow's prestigious VGIK film school returned home in 1987, including Serik Aprimov, Darezhan Omirbayev, Amir Karakulov, Talgat Temenov, all of whom would soon be winning prizes in major film festivals.

The story of the country's film industry began with Rashid Nugmanov's 1988 film *The Needle*, which was a big hit all over the then Soviet Union and one of the first films to break the taboo of talking about drug addiction. Next came Aprimov's *Terminus*, a film depicting the absurdity of daily life in a Kazakh village.

These films set a realist tone, and the works that followed—many of them autobiographical—claim to follow in the tracks of France's "new wave." With their almost documentary styles and ingenuous touches, these films gave directors the freedom to say exactly what they felt.

The period after perestroika and then independence in 1991 proved quite a good time for artists. Government continued to subsidize the film industry and more than 30 private studios sprang up. But most of these have since disappeared due to a lack of cash. In 1994, Kazakhstan (with its 16 million inhabitants) turned out about a dozen films. By 2000 this had fallen to only a handful.

Working conditions are tough, with no laws to encourage private film production, old-fashioned studio equipment, virtually non-existent distribution networks and a public with little money to spend on going to the cinema. Filmmakers have also lost their prestige. The unity of style and subject of the early days has gradually faded, and local films were quickly eclipsed by American imports.

Everyone has adjusted to the new situation in their own way. The luckiest filmmakers, such as Omirbayev and Aprimov, have found foreign production partners—in France and Japan—while others are making advertisements or mortgaging their apartments. ■

CLOÉ DRIEU

RESEARCHER AND ASSISTANT TO DAREZHAN OMIRBAYEV

► directors like Fruit Chan and Stanley Kwan. The interdependence of mainstream and non-mainstream cinema is perhaps most prominent here: Chan and Kwan came through the ranks of commercial cinema during the mid-and late-1980s, when the industry was enjoying a golden age. Now, however, these directors have to seek financing elsewhere.

With the People's Republic unlikely to relax its control, and Hong Kong unlikely to support commercially unviable projects, Chinese-language cinema looks set to follow the Taiwanese model of international funding. How this process will impact on "Chinese national cinema" or even the idea of national cinema per se will prove fascinating to watch. ■

Argentina's gritty resurgence

A constellation of young directors is touching the "rawness of things in the street" with a bare narrative and a poetic eye

DAVID OUBIÑA

UNIVERSITY PROFESSOR AND AUTHOR OF SEVERAL WORKS ON CINEMA

"The present is an absurd legacy of the past," says young Argentine filmmaker Pablo Trapero. "It's crazy that a guy of 50 has to start from scratch like a kid. That kind of absurdity creates a tension I used to tell the story of Rulo."

Rulo, the hero of *Mundo Grúa* (*Crane World*, 1999), Trapero's first feature film, is a worker fighting to survive. Once, long ago, he had his 15 minutes of fame as a member of a rock band, but he is not too nostalgic and meekly accepts his daily lot. He qualifies as a crane operator, but is rejected for the job he wants after failing a medical. Then a job in the provinces comes up, involving driving an excavator at a site hundreds of kilometres from Buenos Aires, far from friends and family. Rulo puts up with this until he gets bored, then returns to Buenos Aires to face an uncertain future. There is something noble about this man who manages to keep going by clinging to what little he has—loyal and unshakeable friendships.

The 28-year-old Trapero studied film at university, and had only made short films before directing *Crane World*. Shooting stretched out over a year since it could only be done when there was enough money for equipment and crew, though the gaps allowed him to put together sequences and rewrite the script as he went along.

"I wanted a film that was like a hidden camera filming snatches of reality," he says. The film, made in semi-documentary style, gives a dramatized view of daily life stripped of all pretence. "The crane is for all of us a symbol of building the future," says

Trapero. "Rulo wants to have a future but he can't get one." Everyday life, familiar characters, a bare narrative and independent production—all are hallmarks of other recent Argentine films that have borrowed from the John Cassavetes tradition of neo-realism and the "new waves" of the 1960s.

The nearest thing Argentina has previously had to this kind of cinema came from the so-called 60s Generation group of filmmakers, who trained in art cinema and short movies. They called for a break with tradition, with the big-studio star system and even with "entertainment," just as their young descendants in the 1990s have been fighting against the hackneyed style of television and other media. The critical and public acclaim received by *Crane World* along with its festival successes have shown how potent this new genre of films can be.

Glossing over a troubled past

The enthusiastic revival of Argentine cinema in the 1960s was fleeting, but it gave birth to two major filmmakers: Leonardo Favio and Hugo Santiago. Several years had to pass, however, before this legacy could be built upon. First, the 1976 military coup put an end to any chance of making films. Then, after democracy was restored in 1983, most new films chose to flatter people's good consciences. This soothing, opportunistic genre was epitomized by Luis Puenzo's *The Official Version* (1984), which won an Oscar for Best Foreign Film and tells how a woman begins to suspect that her adopted daughter is one of the children of people killed by the military. The story is not about the girl or her tortured and murdered parents or about her grandmother who searches for her, but about a woman filled with doubts about herself. Some films, nevertheless confronted the grisly events of the military regime. They included Alejandro Agresti's *Secret Wedding* (1988) and Hugo Santiago's *The Pavements of Saturn* (1985).

The latest batch of films has received scant encouragement. A new film industry law (1994) was immediately applied in the wrong way. Two new taxes—on videocassettes and films broadcast on television—on top of the existing ones (a percentage on every cinema seat sold) were meant to help subsidize Argentine films, but an economic recession cut proceeds to a third of the envisaged amount. Financial aid to films on general release, meanwhile, was disbursed according to box-office receipts. As a result, the animated film *Manuelita* (1999) about a female turtle, seen by two million cinema-goers, received a much larger subsidy than either *Crane World* or *Silvia Prieto*, with 68,000 and 14,000 box-office sales respectively.

But Trapero is not alone in leading a cinematic charge. Martín Rejtman, Esteban Sapir and Adrián Caetano/Bruno Stagnaro are also part of a movement going by the name of "New Argentine Cinema," which has produced the country's most exciting films in recent years. "Films should be about everyday things," says Sapir. "You should shoot in a different way and touch the rawness of life in the street. We have to change cinema by making real life into a poem."

It all began in 1995 with the commercial screening of *Historias Breves*, a collection of short films that had won prizes from the National Institute of Film and Audiovisual Arts. The formula was repeated, and gave impetus to several young directors—Raúl de la Torre, Eliseo Subiela, Juan José Jusid, Daniel Barone and Beda Docampo Feijoo—whose enthusiasm had managed to break through a suffocating academic milieu.

Argentina is now turning out between 20 and 30 films a year. But local showings are not enough to recuperate the one to two million dollars each film costs to make, a budget that directors are unwilling to trim. Rejtman attacks this way of thinking, saying it is "important for filmmakers to stop thinking about sales strategies and start thinking about film strategies. I'm not saying there's no commercial cinema but we have to stop thinking just about that."

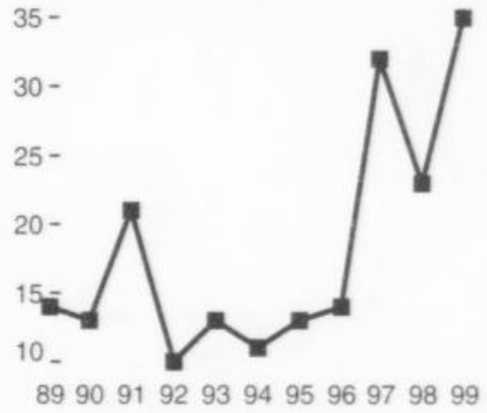
New films like *Pizza, Beer and Cigarettes*, *Crane World* and *Mala Epoca* (Bad Times), which cost four or five times less to make than other movies, had well-balanced investment/return ratios. "We should make films over the next five years that don't cost more than $400,000 each," says Caetano. "That's still a huge

To know more

WORLD PRODUCTION RANK
1999: 19th

LOCAL FILMS' SHARE OF DOMESTIC BOX-OFFICE
1998: 13%

NUMBER OF FILMS PRODUCED



TOTAL POPULATION (millions)
1988: 31.6
1998: 36.1

NUMBER OF SCREENS
1988: 647
1998: 810

CINEMA ADMISSIONS (millions)
1988: 28.4
1998: 32.4

TOTAL FILM PRODUCTION INVESTMENT (US$m)
1999: 133.3

Sources: Screen Digest (*contact: David Hancock@screendigest.com*)

© Cahiers du Cinéma Collection, Paris

Marco Bechis' *Garage Olimpo*: the Argentine military dictatorship revisited.

2. NEW WAVES

amount of money for a country without any." Young filmmakers have learnt to save money by forming co-operatives, not shooting at weekends, using natural backdrops and employing non-professional actors and technicians who are film students.

Stagnaro and Caetano, two of the participants in the *Historias Breves*, co-directed *Pizza, Beer and Cigarettes* in 1997 by respecting these conditions. Its enthusiastic reception highlighted a slowly-developing trend that had evolved from films such as *Fine Powder* (1996) by Esteban Sapir, which combined the experimental style of Godard with novelties from video-art; *Garage Olimpo* (1999) by Marco Bechis, a lucid and painful look at detention centres during the military dictatorship; and *Mala Epoca* (1998) by Mariano de Rosa, Nicolás Saad, Rodrigo Moreno and Salvador Roseli, which linked a number of stories set in a hostile urban context, where everyone appears misplaced and unsettled.

"We film things we'd like to see ourselves as film-goers," says new director Andrés Tambornino. Lucrecia Martel, also shooting her first film, says that what annoys her about the "dinosaurs" (the previous generation of filmmakers) is that they became "indifferent and timid, and so ended up using false metaphors instead of getting out into the street and depicting things as they are."

The new wave of films cannot be called a movement. They do not fit a defined set of values and are not aesthetically uniform. Their vitality comes from their diversity and their different approaches: they share what a country suffered, they share the spirit of a generation, the methods of production, the personal imprint of the author, the shunning of rhetoric and the concern for identity. They give a blunt but impassioned account of Argentina following the military dictatorship, in the era of Presidents Raúl Alfonsín and Carlos Menem.

A film like *Crane World* was a hit because it is a sombre portrait of people who refuse to abandon their hopes. It is this combination of melancholy and resistance that connects Rulo with his audience. ■

© Cahiers du Cinéma Collection, Paris

A statement of intent for Argentine cinema: Pablo Trapero's *Mundo Grua*.

BRAZIL: REVIVAL AT RISK

By the time Itamar Franco was elected president of Brazil in 1992, the country's film industry had virtually disappeared. A year later, a new broadcasting and cinema law lent filmmakers a lifeline: firms that decided to invest in film production were given tax rebates of up to three per cent, and investments could be recouped at the box office.

The Brazilian film industry at once leapt to life. Only two commercial films were made in Brazil in 1992. In 1999, there were 33. Subjects have also become more varied, and locations diversified. New talent has sprung up not just in Rio de Janeiro, but also São Paolo, the northeast and the south of the country.

A number of new films, such as Tata Amaral's *A Starry Sky*, Beto Brant's *Belly* Up, Bruno Barreto's *Four Days in September*, Sergio Rezende's *Lamarca* and Carla Camurati's *Carlota Joaquina*, have addressed violence and the country's military dictatorships, while the sertão, or semi-arid northeast of Brazil—which won renown in the classic Brazilian cinema of the 1960s through movies such as Nelson Pereira dos Santos' *Barren Lives* and Glauber Rocha's *Black God, White Devil*—has been revived as a backdrop.

"You can see in these new films the link between the new wave and television melodrama, which grew in the 1970s and 1980s during a huge surge in production," says critic José Carlos Avellar. Walter Salles' film *Central Station*, which won the Golden Bear prize at the 1998 Berlin Film Festival, illustrates precisely this connection through the story of a boy looking for his father in the sertão with the help of a female teacher.

But economic crisis threatens this surge of creativity. "My new film didn't get a cent under the 1993 law," says Salles, currently shooting in the sertão a Brazilian version of Albanian writer Ismail Kadare's novel *Broken April*.

"The 1993 law has shown itself to be shaky and inadequate," says Paulo Caldas, who has just made a documentary about city life, *The Little Prince's Rap against the Wicked Souls*. Over its first five years, $184 million went on film production via the law and only $12.5 million on distribution and marketing—a tiny sum in a market dominated by American films. ■

PEDRO BUTCHER

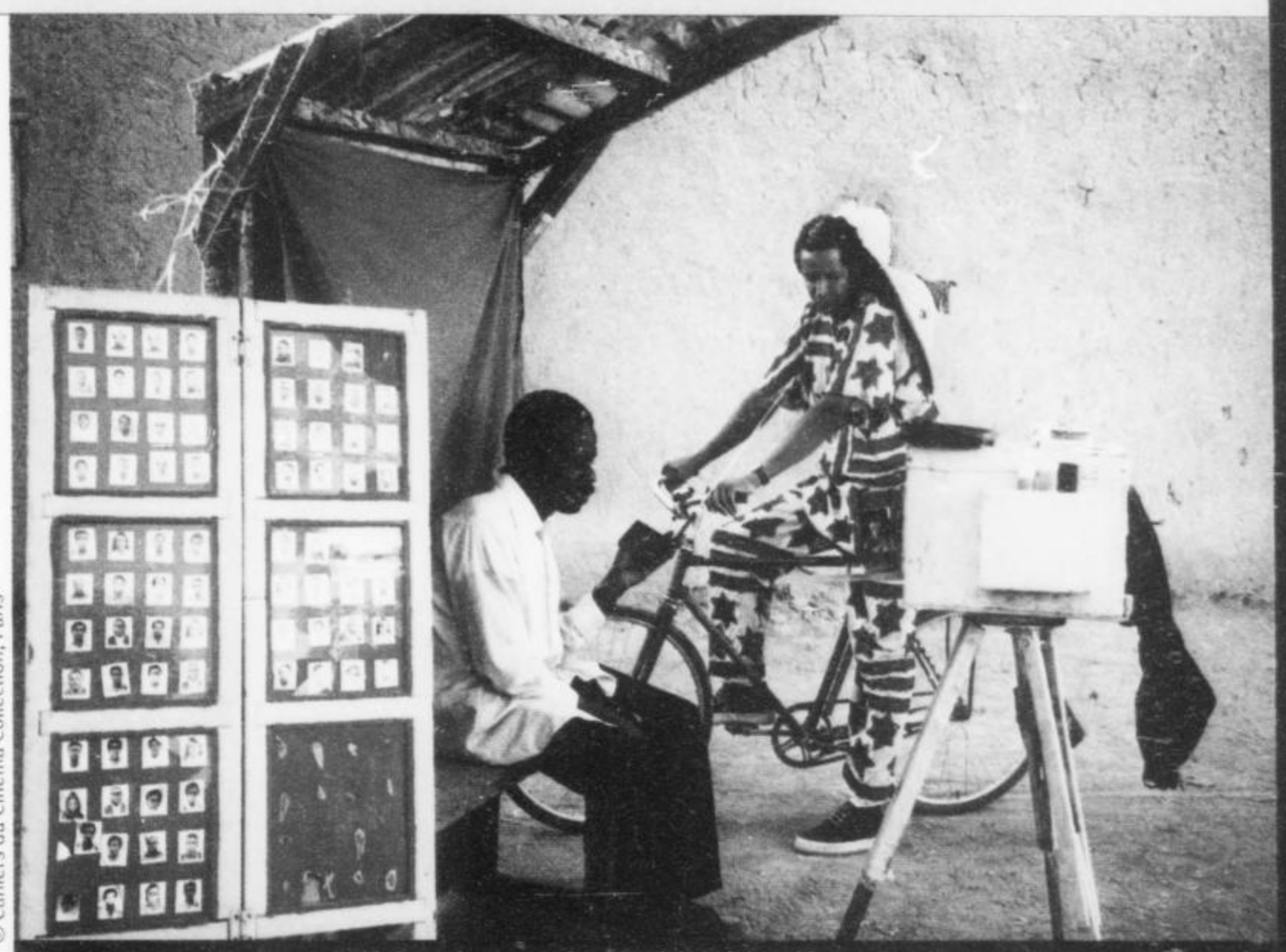
JOURNALIST AT THE *JORNAL DO BRASIL*

Directors in exile

Rithy Panh (Cambodia), Alejandra Rojo (Argentina) and Abderrahmane Sissako (Mauritania) have all settled in France, but the pull of their home country permeates their artistic lives

INTERVIEWS BY SOPHIE BOUKHARI

UNESCO COURIER JOURNALIST



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Abderrahmane Sissako (right) in *Life on Earth*.

How did you get into film?

Rithy Panh: It wasn't something I chose. Film came to me when I went into exile after what I went through in Cambodia. If I'd stayed there, I probably would never have become a filmmaker. It isn't a recognized profession there. But I've always been aware of the power of images. In Cambodia, I lived next door to a film studio, so I used to peak in on the shoots.

The Khmer Rouge genocide is a genocide with no recorded images except for photos. As such, everything is photographed in people's memories. What you've seen and lived through is always running through your mind. It was this—the process of remembering things—that drew me into film. My desire to make them was born here in France. When I arrived in 1979, I knew my work would have to relate to what had happened in Cambodia. After a war, either you keep quiet or you try to piece together what's been shattered. I dabbled in painting and writing, and then, one day, someone lent me a camera for a party at a vocational college where I was taking a carpentry course. Some people made cakes for the occasion, I made a little film. I knew then, at 20, where my vocation stood. I attended classes at IDHEC [a prestigious French film school] and made my first documentary, *Site Number Two*, about a Cambodian refugee camp.

Alejandra Rojo: When I was a kid, I wanted to be a painter. But I was living in a very political environment, not an artistic one. My father was a lawyer and my mother a psychoanalyst. When I was about 15, I lost interest in painting, graduated from high school and began studying science. But two years later, I dropped all that and decided that I wanted to make films. So I followed classes and took the plunge.

Abderrahmane Sissako: I was brought up in Mali and returned to Mauritania to finish high school. Right after that, I went off to the Soviet Union, like thousands of other African students. It was easier to go there than to France. I had a scholarship to study film and I started making my own.

How did you come to France?

Panh: Because of the Khmer Rouge. I was 17 years old. Many members of my family were killed and the rest of them fled to France.

Rojo: I came here when I was 12, as an exile. My father defended political prisoners. The whole family had to leave Argentina. It was the time of the death squads—22,000 people disappeared. We were apparently on the target list.

Sissako: I came in 1993 because my film *October* had been chosen for the Cannes Film Festival. I was invited to stay here and continue filmmaking. I spent 12 years in Russia and now I'm in France. For how long, I don't know.

The films are a roadmap through emotional and intellectual terrain that provides a solution on how to save pain. John Cassavetes, American film director (1929-1989)

© Marion Bartel, Paris

Alejandra Rojo of Argentina

What are the pros and cons of living outside your own country? Does it affect the way you make films?

Panh: When you're an exile, you don't really have an identity any more. Whether in Cambodia or France, I'm kind of at home everywhere and nowhere. Far and close from everything. I'm inter-

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ested in this distance. It allows you to stand back and to see further, to grasp the shape of things. The lesser evil for an exile is managing to make use of this. I go back to Cambodia and then I leave it again. It's a natural cycle. Coming back to a Paris film studio is somewhat like going on a retreat. I recharge my batteries. Cambodia is a cultural desert.

Rojo: Exile changes your whole destiny. No matter what, it's always uprooting. But half my family wasn't killed or put in concentration camps. I had a two-week sea voyage and then understood what a drop in status meant. You were someone back home and suddenly you became nobody. In the end, that's not such a bad thing. You're less at the mercy of your social background. You see things from a more personal standpoint. Having to work in another language creates a style simply because you're not fully in tune with what's being said. I'm always aware of the gap, that what's one way here would be different there. Many immigrants share this feeling of living a double life. But as an artist, I manage to go beyond this stage. A film, a painting, a piece of music are all countries in themselves. You don't need a country once you have that. Exile is a moderately interesting life experience, but it's fascinating from a cinematographic standpoint. It's a source of new ideas and stories. Our age makes me think of some science fiction stories about inter-galactic peoples who move about and migrate on a mass scale. When I sit down to write, I don't tell myself that I'm going to write stories about exiled people. They just come to me, from deep down in my sub-conscious. You don't make the films you want. You make the films that have to be made.

I made films so my mother, who didn't go to school, could read the pictures. Safi Faye, Senegalese film director (1943-)

Sissako: Exile is always a handicap. But distance allows you to look at your own country, its past, its history from a slightly foreign viewpoint. When we talk about home, we tend to hesitate, to go by feel. It's a delicate process that you can lose a grip on at any moment. Maybe we have more sensitivity. Sometimes you choose to be silent and allow people to interpret.

What ties do you have with your native country?

Panh: I've just made my first film in France, a documentary about the Cambodian community here. I've also shot one film in Mali. I've made all the others in Cambodia. I'm interested in living with the people there. The film nearly becomes secondary. Here, I feel tired and stressed. There, the people who have to fight to survive give me strength. Survivors always feel guilty. To escape from this strange feeling, I need to be with other people. The camera lets me do that—lets me say I have words, dreams and thoughts to express, that I really belong to the world. Film has helped me restore my own dignity. In Cambodia, I'm also helping to train filmmakers and technicians, with assistance from the Ministry of Culture. Over the past 10 years, we've put together a good team.

Rojo: I don't go back to Argentina very often. The last time, I felt I was living in an American colony. Here in France, you don't realize how fast globalization is racing ahead. The countries of the South are becoming colonies, holiday camps or military camps of the great American empire. There's a film to be made about that. I'd go back to Argentina to work, but that's all. It's to do with my family being rejected. I don't see anything too exciting about being Argentinian and it's very hard to feel a cultural identity there. It's a sort of recent patchwork of which I'm a good example. My maternal grandmother was Lithuanian and her husband was an Egyptian who spoke Yiddish. My paternal grandfather, who was a Spanish Catholic, married a Russian-German Protestant.

Sissako: I often go to Mali and Mauritania—usually about twice a year, often to check film locations. I go back and forth. Each trip enriches and alters the story and each casting changes the film in some way.

Do you have any urge to live in your native country?

Panh: Definitely. But there's no movie business in Cambodia. It's easier to find the money in France. I raise money here but I keep to small Cambodian-scale budgets.

Rojo: I think there's something in Latin America that's worth really looking into, but I haven't found it yet.

Sissako: I know I'll go home one day. I'm in France for financial reasons. I'm starting to be known and I'm getting some interesting proposals from producers and television. It's very hard to work in our countries. Filmmakers are on their own. There's no money to be had, no local film industry, no film schools. Africa's always had this dearth of production and things are just getting worse. No more than 10 films a year are made on the whole continent. You can't have a ski champion in a country where there's no snow.

What are your plans?

Panh: Apart from fiction and documentaries, the project closest to my heart is the gathering of a film archive on the Cambodian genocide. Over the next 20 years, the witnesses will either die or their memories will become distorted. We live in a society dominated by images. If we don't make our own images, we won't exist any more. The countries of the South are going to die of that too, after already being economically pillaged.

Rojo: I'm working on a story about a woman with a split personality. About a robot that replaces a woman.

Sissako: My next film will be about exile. I'm going to try to tell the story of people who apply to emigrate, who are waiting to leave. I'd like to show that exile begins before the voyage itself. My films are often linked to my own life. At the same time, I'll try to tell how I got into film. ■

© John Vink/Magnum, Paris

Cambodian Rithy Panh

Technology, the artist's ally

All filmmakers can profit from new technology, says Egyptian director Yousri Nasrallah. The only trouble is that it may turn distribution networks upside down

BY YOUSRI NASRALLAH

EGYPTIAN FILMMAKER, WHOSE LAST FILM *EL MEDINA* WAS SHOWN AT THE LOCARNO FESTIVAL (SWITZERLAND) IN 1999

D.R.

A scene from *Dancer in the Dark* (Lars von Trier), a film shot with about 100 digital cameras.

I made my fourth and latest feature film, *El Medina*, in digital video on the streets of Cairo and in Paris. I was the first Egyptian director to make a fiction film using this new technique. After the talkies, colour and the advent of television, many people see digital video as the fourth revolution in the history of cinema.

It already has talented aficionados such as Lars von Trier and the other Danish directors who support his Dogma statement of film principles. Their watchwords: shoot with a camera on your shoulder, use no artificial lighting to be as true to life as possible. Such a doctrine could only come from a rich country, where creative people need self-imposed restrictions to flower. We on the other hand have to cope with authoritarian regimes and the dead hand of censorship. I've given up 35mm cameras not out of principle, but for practical reasons. My budgets won't allow me to do otherwise.

No easy images

Pragmatism means first of all not going on about the film you might have made. Just do it, with every resource you can lay your hands on. I have only one rule: I must keep my independence. For my first feature, *Vols d'Été* (Summer Flights), made in 1988, I wanted a star from the Egyptian big-studio system to play the wife of a landowner living in the 1950s who hated [former Egyptian president, Gamal Abdel] Nasser. But she just wouldn't accept the part. Her fans wouldn't understand, she said. Changing the script would be to lose my independence. So I shot the film with non-professionals—an architect, a tourist guide and a journalist.

Whether it's amateur actors or digital video, once I've accepted the limitations that I haven't chosen, I have to sort out the problems they bring. And that's what I like. That's where creation starts.

Technique is never an artist's enemy. A painter will try goache, oil or wash drawing techniques. You and the cinematographer on a film simply want the most out of the camera. Unlike 35mm film, video doesn't have depth of field: right close up or very far off, you get the same sharp image. To give the shots depth, we tried to add as much colour as possible, using painted walls and brightly-coloured clothing. And we established the film's visual style to suit the story of these people who watch each other from their balconies.

When a new technology appears, we often start by asking the wrong questions. Digital video is cheaper, so will it lower artistic standards? Not at all. The invention of the pencil didn't lead to standardized literature. Young directors have to understand that there are no such things as easy images, only a less costly way to tackle problems. But the fear that new techniques will make things uniform is understandable. Digital video has given rise to a fashion that says because the cameras are light, you ought to run all over the place. But do you remember Julien Duvivier's film *The Great Waltz*? The camera was big as a wardrobe, but it spun round with the greatest of ease because the film required it to. Likewise, a video film sometimes requires fixed shots.

Doubts about new technology tend to centre on distribution, because there is talk of cinemas showing films beamed in by satellite. For big films, shown in thousands of cinemas, this method is justified. But the telecommunications giants are trying to secure a monopoly. So what will happen then to all the "little" films produced in poor countries?

The power of technology, however, always reaches a limit. For many years, we were cut off from each other by television and its production methods. All of us: viewers, producers and scriptwriters. But look at the credits of Fellini's or Youssef Chahine's films from the 1950s. There were many authors—people who wanted to meet each other and talk about life and films. It was wonderful. Today young filmmakers are rubbing shoulders, working together and fighting against such isolation. The same desire is there. And that goes for me too. Every film I make, I want to get as many people together as I can. ■

Supporters of the death penalty celebrate an execution at the prison in Huntsville, Texas.

ETHICS

U.S. death penalty: victims seize the high ground

On the eve of the U.S. presidential elections, the death penalty—repudiated by almost all democratic nations—is notable only for its absence from debate. Abolitionists are changing their tactics to 'win over' a majority

BY IVAN BRISCOE
UNESCO Courier JOURNALIST

Though the legal battle was arduous, Gary Gilmore eventually got what he had longed for on January 17, 1977. Tied by nylon rope to an office chair, with a white target disc pinned to his chest, the petty thief and lovesick murderer stared down the barrels of five state rifles. After ten idle years, the firing squad in a Utah jailhouse sent a signal around the world: executions in the United States were back.

Since Gilmore's landmark demise—hastened by his own preference for death in place of jail—a further 663 people have followed, killed by lethal injections, electric currents or poison gas administered on judicial orders. What started in the late 1970s as a dribble of ill-fated convicts had, by the turn of the century, become a regular feature of the nation's public life, played out to a peculiar combination of silence from U.S. politicians and last-ditch pleas for clemency from the European Union, Amnesty International and other moral bulwarks of the West.

The contrast with the rest of the democratic world—of which the United States considers itself the leader—is more marked on the issue of the death penalty than possibly any other aspect of domestic policy. While U.S. foreign policy bears down on "rogue states," its executioners keep good rhythm with the likes of Iran and Iraq (though remain way behind

group leader, China). When a proposed worldwide moratorium on the penalty came up for debate in the UN Human Right Commission in April 1999, the U.S. predictably voted against, along with Cuba, China, Sudan and nine other nations. Some 108 countries, on the other hand, have in law or in practice abolished the punishment, with Turkmenistan and Ukraine among the most recent to enlist.

The appeal of tough justice

For the average high-level U.S. politician however, the death penalty has only minor administrative defects, if any at all. Of the four presidential and vice-presidential candidates lining up in elections on November 7, all support the punishment—from Democrat candidate Al Gore to Republican George W Bush, who has ratcheted up its use in his last five years as Texas governor, granting only one reprieve and rubber-stamping 144 executions. Public support for the penalty, in spite of a major new abolitionist offensive that has helped cut approval ratings from a high of 80 per cent, still hovers over 60 per cent.

"I call it the silver bullet, in reference to the Lone Ranger [a U.S. television series set in the Wild West]," explains Robert Bohm, a professor in criminology and death penalty expert from the University of Central Florida. "A lot of people in this country who are very fearful of crime, whether rationally or not, are looking for a silver bullet to deal with it—and the death penalty is a very attractive bullet."

A host of arguments, used previously by philosophers as venerable as Thomas Aquinas and Jean-Jacques Rousseau, have helped make the penalty an emblem of tough justice. Despite a lack of agreed data, defenders of capital punishment in the U.S. argue that the system is cheap, acts as a deterrent and prevents supposedly "liberal" parole boards from releasing jailed murderers into an unsuspecting world—a practice that Dudley Sharp, from the Justice For All project, says has led to 10,000 killings since 1971. Above all else, the penalty is vaunted as the only true outlet for a society outraged by heinous crimes; as Rousseau wrote, "in killing the criminal, we destroy not so much a citizen as an enemy."

In response, a new generation of abolitionists has quietly shed its moral indignation. No longer are the lives of serial killers and sociopaths held to be inherently worth preserving. Instead, press-friendly groups like the Death Penalty Information Centre stress the injustices of its application, from the racial inequities that it breeds to the risk that innocents might be slaughtered.

For the Centre's director, Richard Dieter, this strategy aims to conquer America's famed middle ground, that majority of people who seem to support the penalty without great conviction or passion. "The death penalty seems to have all this baggage, all these problems —innocent people, international opposition, unfairness, racial problems," he argues. "That's a lot of baggage, and it may not be worth it." In January, to Dieter's delight, Illinois' Republican governor shelved the penalty over concerns that innocent people might be executed. The governor, fittingly, had been a lifelong supporter of capital punishment.

Miguel Angel Martinez is one of around 3,600 inmates whose life is at stake. In 1992, a Texan court found the prospective Air Force cadet guilty of murdering three men in a gang knife assault—an attack in which his new lawyer insists he was a "bit player." He was sentenced to death at the age of 17, four years before he was legally entitled to drink beer.

Writing from what he terms the "man-made hell" of Terrell Unit in Texas, Martinez says he harbours hopes for the new abolition campaign. But death row has razed all his faiths. Religion he sees as a "hollow vessel," while society is a place of hate: "you know, there is still an actual conditioning in people to accept punishment even when other options exist ... We are all sadists and masochists to a degree."

"It's about paying for your sins and creating some sort of equilibrium: a life is taken, and therefore another life should be taken"

For many outside the United States, it is precisely this unnecessary cruelty that taints the death penalty, even though the same countries that now scorn the punishment enjoyed their own illustrious moments with the noose, guillotine and hatchet man. British law—which heavily influenced practice in its colonies—was bent on execution. By the 18th century, for instance, 222 crimes were punishable by death in Britain, including robbing a rabbit warren and cutting down a tree. The public, in turn, liked nothing better than a picnic at the gallows. When one notorious murderer was hanged in 1807 in London, 40,000 people turned up, though an ensuing mass frenzy killed a hundred of them.

Following World War II and the spread of codified human rights, many nations reconsidered, then scrapped the penalty. But the United States proved an exception to the rule: even in the ten-year hiatus from 1967 to Gilmore's execution, courts and states, acting on a temporary plunge in the penalty's popularity, shunned what one Supreme Court justice termed the "machinery of death" instead of dismantling it outright. Indeed when the Supreme Court issued its *Furman vs Georgia* rulings in 1972, declaring the penalty to be "cruel and unusual," furious southern state legislators busied themselves with redrafting their statutes to accommodate the Court's objections. As violent crime climbed steeply upwards in the recession-hit 1970s, a new-look death penalty was ready and waiting in several state law books. Some 38 states now feature the sentence in their penal codes, while around three per cent of the nation's convicted murderers are dispatched to death row.

Victims' rights and the draw of opinion polls

Underlying this penchant for capital punishment—particularly marked in eight southern states, home to 90 per cent of recent executions—appears a deep-rooted sense of what justice means. When Alan Wolfe, a Boston University politics professor, went to Texas to research opinions towards the 1998 execution of Karla Faye Tucker, he was astonished by the response: rather than feel pity for the cheery 38-year-old inmate who had repented and "found God," most people believed death to be perfect retribution for her pickaxe slaying of an ex-lover.

"I think it touched on a very basic, fundamental view of society that people have, that is pre-political and pre-religious, that has to do with an inherent sense of what justice means," says Wolfe. "It's about paying for your sins and creating some sort of equilibrium: a life is taken, and therefore another life should be taken."

Retribution and scant pity for the murderer dominate the thinking of those who fervently back the penalty—especially the victims' relatives. The first relative allowed under a new Texan law in 1996 to witness the execution of the murderer recalled how "I would like to have seen him humiliated a bit. I think he should have been brought in and strapped down in front of us." In radio talks shows across the land, callers demand that killers be "fried" so they can "meet Hitler."

The irony is that this atavistic sense of justice is so out of synch with other trends in U.S. culture. Most Christian teachings ▶

point to the importance of forgiveness, and most Americans are practising Christians. Daytime television has made therapy, and its motifs of confessing past sins and reinvention, central to people's lives. But murder and punishment, above all in the south, still follow the dictates of an "eye for an eye." And while violent crimes soared over the past two decades, claiming the lives of 500,000 Americans (with around 17,000 murders a year at present) and drawing gruesome media coverage, adherence to this philosophy of uncomplicated vengeance grew inexorably. The victim—and concepts of victimhood—now stand at the heart of the modern U.S. death penalty, whether in the sentencing phase of the murder trial, when bereaved relatives take the stand, or in state politicians' rhetoric. "If the debate is just over the penalty or not the death penalty," sighs Dieter, "it's like asking whether you're for criminals or victims."

Public opinion in countries like Britain or France, however, was hardly very different. In almost all cases, clear majorities supported the penalty, though political leaders resolved to push through with abolition all the same. Politicians in the United States, on the other hand, have been unwilling or unable to emulate these feats. The generation that was so closely linked to the civil rights era—the Kennedys, Martin Luther King—may have been equipped to do so, but its figureheads were fated to die early. Meaningful debate has been further impeded by the penalty's deployment at state level, often boxing the issue into a local crime perspective, and by the absence of other proposals such as gun control or poverty programmes, ruled out by costs and lobbies. But more than any other factor, it is what observers see as the frenetic nature of U.S. democracy, with its comparatively weak political parties, incessant elections and hyper-sensitivity to opinion polls, that has exposed candidates to constant courting of voters' hunches.

The price of opposing the penalty became evident in the mishaps of Michael Dukakis, Democratic presidential candidate in 1988, who turgidly repeated his opposition to the penalty when asked what he would do if his wife and children were slain and thus was branded "weak" on crime. All politicians swiftly learnt that support for the penalty, though it may not have mattered to them much as an issue, was a vote-securing synonym for "toughness" on crime. For elected district attorneys (local prosecutors), who often later become judges, exploitation of the issue became rife. "It's a quick way to get on television and get your name in the paper," says Michael Mears, from the Georgia Indigent Defense Council. "It's a placebo for the public, like giving the patient a sugar-coated tablet."

With victims occupying the moral high ground and politicians unable to draw themselves away from the glitter of a poll booster, the practical tack taken by the new abolitionists seems sensible. Already they appear to have convinced the majority of the American public that innocent lives may have been shed. Dieter's centre lists 87 people exonerated from death row since the penalty's reinstatement, while several DNA tests are currently underway in an effort to discover the first scientific confirmation of an executed innocent.

Racial bias in imposition of the death penalty has provided yet further ammunition for the punishment's opponents. Although black murderers are proportionately under-represented on death row, there is undeniable statistical evidence showing that death penalties are imposed almost entirely (over 80 percent) when victims are white. In Georgia, meanwhile, Mears reports that only one out of 159 district attorneys is black. For many campaigners, says criminology professor Robert Bohm, the penalty is simply "a new form of social control that replaced slavery."

Protestors rally against the execution of Gary Graham in Texas (June 2000).

© Howell/Liaison/Gamma, Paris

Calls for a moratorium

In the case of Martinez, prejudice (he is Mexican-American), poverty, and the fact that an accomplice's father was a local judge appeared to have vitiated all chance of leniency. Indeed his legal saga reads like a litany of the death penalty's iniquities: his trial lasted five days, the alleged accomplices are free, and a large part of the local district attorney's office has since been sacked for taking bribes. "It is like two people playing chess, one who is very good at it and another who is just learning how the pieces move," he recalls of his trial.

His case and others have led campaigners to hope a moratorium may be called as the "silver bullet" is sullied by procedural failure, and maybe buried by a richer variety of crime policies. Sceptics for their part warn that the machinery of death could just be reinvented in a sleeker, "fairer" guise. But one thing seems clear: if the penalty goes, it will not go at the behest of an ethical revolution. As Wolfe argues, "if you leave out the morality entirely, I think Americans would be very sympathetic to halting or at least slowing capital punishment." ■

To know more

- www.prodeathpenalty.com
supporting the death penalty
- www.deathpenaltyinfo.org
Death Penalty Information Centre
- www.miguelangelmartinez.com
website of Miguel Angel Martinez
- www.knoware.nl/users/annegr/deadman/talking.htm
articles by death row inmate Dean Carter

Moving Africa with a dance rhythm

Everyone dances in Africa: from this simple truth, Alphonse Tiérou, a choreographer and researcher from Côte d'Ivoire, fashions his faith in dance's power to push society onwards

INTERVIEW BY JASMINA SOPOVA
UNESCO COURIER JOURNALIST

Your last work is entitled "*If Dance Moves, Africa Will Move*". What do you mean by that?

A country's economic and social development does not depend only on its capital and labour, as economists and the free-market tradition suggest. Culture is just as important. In *La société de confiance* ("The Society of Trust"), published in 1995, the French academic Alain Peyrefitte correctly explained that the main theories placing economic resources such as raw materials, capital, labour, production, investment, and growth rates at the heart of development were out of date. He said that cultural factors, which have been relegated to the rank of "bystanders," should be regarded as a basic driving force of progress. In truth, the intangible, immaterial aspects of culture help to shape people's mentalities. That's why they are the real locomotive of any society. If they are neglected, if they are not put at the core of thinking about development, there is a chance they may turn into insurmountable obstacles.

What cultural factors impede development in Africa?

Taboos, superstition, polygamy and tribalism are some of them. How can a woman lead a fulfilling life when she is constantly struggling against her rivals to keep her husband's affection? How can you bring up your children the way you want to when you must submit to your elders' authority? How can you think and reflect with a calm, level head when 10 or 20 of you are living under the same roof? In my opinion, this custom is an abuse of the traditional values of brotherhood and generosity because it stands in the way of personal self-fulfillment. You can't save money or achieve personal goals because you must obey the group's demands. In this "gregarious" society, whose roots lie in traditional culture, it is inconceivable for the individual to have an existence outside his or her community. But individuality is precisely where the source of progress lies.

Of all these problems, the most serious is probably an inferiority complex, which has a tremendous hold in Africa. It generates a culture of dependence to the detriment of a culture of responsibility, paralyzes and suffocates the whole continent, destroys the basis of social cohesiveness. I'm convinced that the main cause of under-development in Africa is a lack of self-confidence.

What do you mean by that?

Africans do not trust Africans. Whites enjoy more consideration and are given more resources than blacks. Take a personal example. In 1987, during a lecture tour in black Africa, I was arrested in one country and brought before the ministry of youth, sports, culture and scientific research, which considered my speech on African culture suspicious. At the end of a prolonged interrogation, a white man ▶

A pioneering theorist of African choreography

The choreographer and independent researcher Alphonse Tiérou, 43, comes from a long line of great "families" that are heirs to the wisdom masks of West Africa. Brought up among great chiefs and prominent dignitaries, he studied at the National Arts Institute in Abidjan, then capital of his native Côte d'Ivoire, after a traditional education in African dialectic and rhetoric.

Tiérou's first book, *Le Nom africain ou langage des traditions* ("The African Name or the Language of Traditions"), published in 1977, is about oral civilization. His work on African masks, *Vérité première du second visage africain* ("The First Truth of the Second African Face"), came out one year later. In 1983, he published *La Danse africaine c'est la vie* ("African Dance is Life"), followed by his main work on traditional choreography, *Dooplé: The Eternal Law of African Dance* (his only work translated into English by Harwood Academic Publishers, 1992), which has gone through three editions in French since 1989. His first novel, *Ségoulédé*, came out in 1992. His next book, which will be published by the same Paris-based company, Maisonneuve et Larose, is entitled *Si la danse bouge, l'Afrique bougera* ("If Dance Moves, Africa Will Move").

Alphonse Tiérou also devised the touring exhibition that came to the Musée de l'Homme in Paris in June 2000 under the title "From dance to sculpture: a different view of African aesthetics. "

He is currently the director of the Dooplé resource, teaching and research centre for African creation in Paris. For more information, call (33 1) 44 73 42 01.

Nelson Mandela dances with a choir of compatriots at the 8th Assembly of the World Council of Churches (December 1999).

© Howard Burditt/Reuters/MaxPPP, Paris

walked into the office. He spoke out on my behalf. The minister immediately changed his tone. After a few phone calls, he opened doors for me to all the media while the most beautiful conference hall in the city, the place used by the country's sole political party, was placed at my disposal. Similar things happen every day in our countries.

This inferiority complex can also be seen in the relationship with traditional dance. Sometimes, African artists who have acquired a veneer of training in Western dance hurriedly denigrate their roots. Likewise, instead of developing their own analyses, African intellectuals just repeat everything that some foreign pseudo-specialists say and write about their culture. The problem is that the discourse of these specialists often locks African dance in a ghetto and denies the continent the right to evolve and modernize. They see Africa as a living museum of past traditions.

Can dance change that mentality?

I'm convinced it can. The creative act is fundamental to the emancipation of the individual. Everyone knows that. But it is even more fundamental in the African context, where individuality, the source of progress, is often stifled by group pressure and conformity.

That is where dance can be a factor of development. It can tear up the old stumps, destroy the causes of evil that are deeply rooted in the human sub-conscious, give individuals the possibility of belonging, of finding and fulfilling themselves. That is how it can make society move. Because only a society made up of free and self-confident individuals can find the right solutions to its problems.

Dance, a major component of African culture, mobilizes a vast amount of energy that should be more effectively channelled. Everybody dances in Africa: pharaohs, queens and kings, saints, the masks of wisdom, pregnant women, babies, old folks, judges, generals, heads of state—remember Mandela? Governments in Africa should take more account of the emancipatory qualities of dance, and also give artists and researchers the means to pursue their work more effectively. They mustn't forget that the very fact of researching our dances, which condition our entire lives, means agreeing to accepting ourselves as we are, freeing us from our complexes, making us feel good about who we are and what we think, proving that we have confidence in ourselves, in all Africans and in the rest of the world.

Dance can tear up the old stumps, destroy the causes of evil that are deeply rooted in the human sub-conscious, give individuals the possibility of belonging, of finding and fulfilling themselves

How can African dance help to establish a relationship with the rest of the world?

Choreography is an "exportable" cultural product. On a large scale, it could become an asset for modern Africa. Since African dance has spread worldwide, it has done more to bring young people from the North and South closer together than any other policy, no matter how good and well-intentioned. Dance is still the shortest route linking one individual to another. It is about passion and seduction. During the period of colonization, Westerners understood this perfectly well and made it illegal to dance with Africans.

In the past few decades, thanks to the African diaspora and to the many dance courses held in the North as well as the South, the trend has started moving in the opposite direction. Real exchanges have taken place, sincere and deep friendships have been woven in a spirit of mutual trust, dignity and respect. The rising interest in African dance calls for an adequate response on the part of Africans themselves, so that supply grows at the same pace as demand. Because, to paraphrase the French philosopher Albert Jacquard, on the dance floor "the only worthy goal is not to be better than others, but to be better because of others." ■

Moving Africa with a dance rhythm

TELL ME HOW YOU DANCE AND I'LL TELL YOU WHO YOU ARE

ALPHONSE TIÉROU

DIRECTOR OF THE DOOPLÉ RESOURCE, TEACHING AND RESEARCH CENTRE FOR AFRICAN CREATION IN PARIS

In Africa, dance and the economy are intrinsically connected: the origins of the *dooplé*, the first of ten basic movements in African dance, lie in the motion of using the pestle

The great poet and president of Senegal, Léopold Sédar Senghor, said that by using the word "step," the Europeans had turned dance into an abstract game "to take man off the earth and project him into the sky." Africans prefer the expression "basic movement," because it implies a connection between the dancer and the earth. A famous verse by the same poet perfectly expresses this symbiotic relationship between human beings and the earth beneath them: "We are dancing people whose feet are revitalized by stamping them on the hard ground."

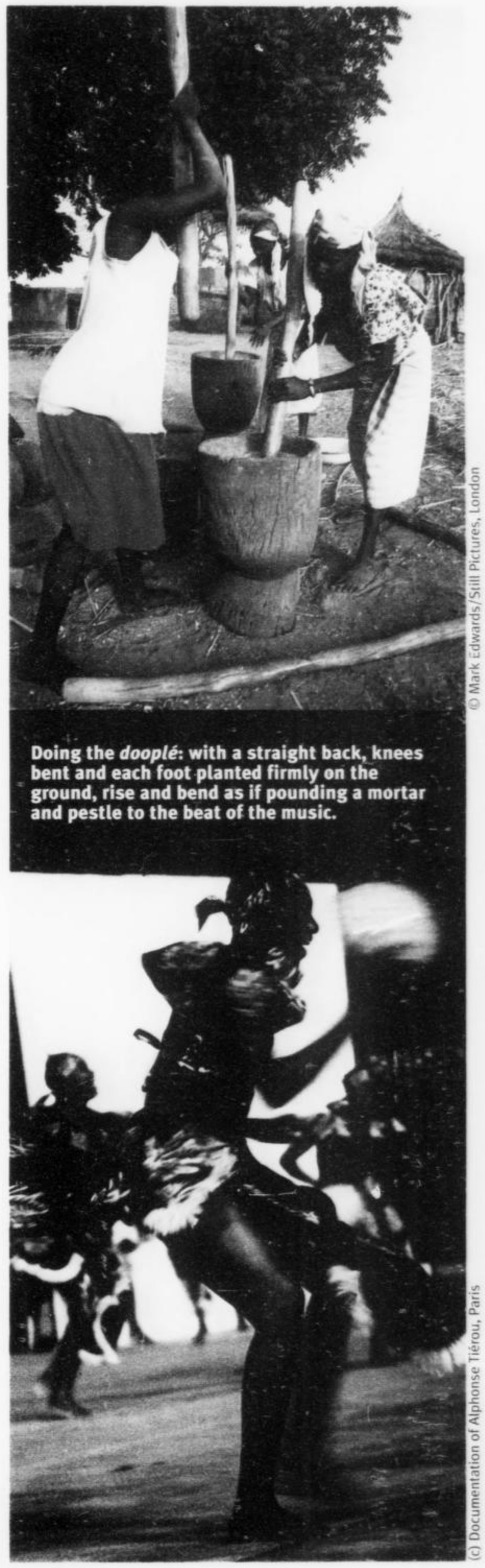
The first of the ten basic movements, which I have observed in all the regions and among all the peoples of Africa, is the *dooplé*. This is a composite term borrowed from Oueoulou, the secret language of the *glaé*, a community of mask bearers belonging to the Wêon people, who live in western Côte d'Ivoire. *Gla* (the singular of *glaé*) means mask in the African sense of the term, in other words the costume, the accessories and those who wear them. I have chosen the language of this community of wisdom masks (in Africa, the mask is considered a living entity) because it is sacred, spiritual, divine and, as a result, belongs to no single group of people. Furthermore, the Wêon (also known as the Guéré) are the guardians of the only *glaé* prayer, whose content clearly expresses the combined spiritual, technical and structural aspects of dance.

In Oueoulou, *doo* means mortar and *plé*, pestle. These are cooking utensils common to every part of Africa and occupy a central place in everyday life.

The movement of a person using a pestle is the basis of African dance. On the one hand, the pestle pounding the mortar produces sounds, percussion, a beat—in short, music. On the other hand, the up-and-down movement of the *plé* beating against the *doo* makes it shake, tremble, move—in other words, dance. So the *doo* becomes a musical instrument, the *plé* a dancing object and the person doing the pounding, a composer.

Dance conveys our vision of the world and conditions our entire existence. Its basic movements are all symbolically charged. They express a person's relationship to the Earth, to God, to the community of the living and that of the dead. Each movement also has a specific meaning: dancing in a bent-over position with arms folded over the chest is a symbol of initiation; stamping feet on the ground is a show of extreme joy; tapping foreheads against each other is an act of communion. Dance is thus a coded language that creates a dialogue between dancers and spectators familiar with its underlying symbolism, signifying that it cannot be measured against Western standards despite frequent attempts to do exactly that. In African dance, for example, showing two open hands is a sign of honesty, clear conscience and hospitality. In contemporary dance, the same gesture symbolizes the density of the air that the artist embraces or pushes away. Joining the palms of two hands together is a gesture of prayer in the Christian world. For Africans, however, it is a way of concentrating all the body's energy, the right hand having a negative polarity and the left, a positive polarity. The symbolism of these movements is rooted in an ethical, aesthetic and social context that cannot be ignored if one wants to grasp the full meaning of African dance. And even less so if one wants to judge it. ■

Dance is a coded language that creates a dialogue between dancers and spectators familiar with its underlying symbolism



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Doing the *dooplé*: with a straight back, knees bent and each foot planted firmly on the ground, rise and bend as if pounding a mortar and pestle to the beat of the music.

(c) Documentation of Alphonse Tiérou, Paris

Digital disappearances

Obsolete machines and the ephemeral nature of web-based materials are just some of the hurdles confronting archivists as they struggle to preserve the world's digital heritage

SARA GOULD AND MARIE-THÉRÈSE VARLAMOFF

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The wobble of Neil Armstrong's legendary leaps on the moon are engraved in the memory of at least a generation. Yet 30 years later, much of the actual data from that mission has been lost. Apparently, NASA lacked the foresight to save the equipment and software required to read it. If the scourge of technological obsolescence can cause such a loss for the world's leading space agency, imagine the challenge awaiting national libraries in their task to preserve the world's digital heritage.

Just a few years ago, digital technologies emerged as a godsend for archivists. As e-mail and the Internet spread, pundits began taking bets on how long it would take for paper to disappear. Libraries with the financial means began digitizing their collections. Instead of submitting their precious collections to page-fraying, spine-breaking habits of scholars in a merciless search for key passages, librarians handed them a slim pair of CD-ROMs, digital copies of the great works, which could be scanned in minutes. With a flip of a switch, libraries could signficantly expand access to their collections.

Yet in the frenzy to digitize, precious resources may have been wasted. Without a co-ordinated strategy, some sister organizations have made digital copies of similar sections of their collections. With a bit more foresight, they might have worked together to offer a more diverse selection. Converted to the cult of the new technologies, others have been a bit too zealous in cleaning up—throwing out—their ageing documents like old newspapers. And finally, some of the more prestigious institutions have fallen upon a double-edged sword after proudly displaying the gems of their collections on the Internet. The digital versions whetted the general public's appetite to see the "real thing" which means that crowning documents like the Magna Carta risk becoming veritable attractions.

Ironically, the supposed saviour, digitization, may be an enemy in the battle to build and preserve perpetual archives. To begin with, the technology is so new that we cannot be certain of the longevity of, for example, CD-ROMs. A more immediate threat lies in the extraordinary speed of technological progress. "The great creator becomes the great eraser," warns an American futurist, Stewart Brand. We can read a thousand-year-old manuscript, yet archivists cannot decipher some materials that are less than 20 years old.

In the near future, those who study literary history will be at a loss if all they have is a diskette containing the final "clean" version

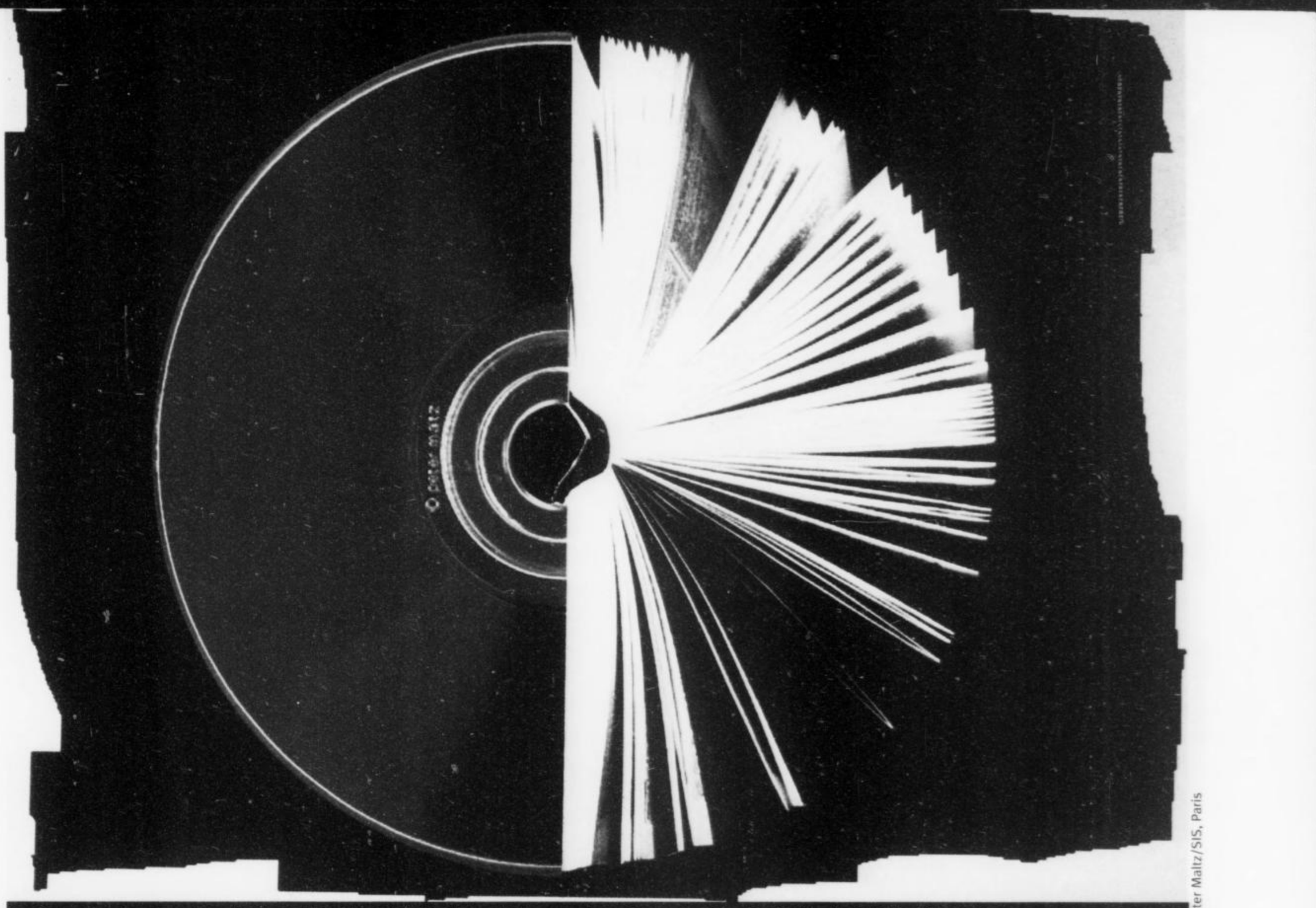
Remember the old floppy discs of the not-so-distant past? If by some miracle a library finds some of those clunky machines, the chances of acquiring spare parts, the right software required and a trained technician are just about nil. Today, "backward compatible" software—that designed to read old versions—generally only covers one or two generations of changes, which offers little relief when the average life cycle of hardware and software is a mere 18 months. Indeed, the U.S. based Research Libraries Group found in a 1998 survey that nearly half (15 of 36) of its member institutions reported losing access to part of their digital holdings because of obsolescence.

Awaiting a long-term solution, archivists continue to rely on a veritable relic: microfilm for crumbling paper collections. But the old stand-by does little to resolve the latest thorn in their side: the new wave of "born-digitals," works created on computer-like websites and electronic journals.

Consider the case of continually updated documents on the Web. Should we preserve all the various drafts of the document or only the final version? The drafts of great works of literature are treasure troves for scholars. For instance, Victor Hugo's splendid handwriting and the powerful drawings he used to fill in the margins of the pale blue paper he favoured are rich in historical significance. In the near future, those who study literary history will be at a loss if all they have is a diskette containing the final "clean" version with no draft, no hesitation, no notes, no drawings nor doodles.

The same is true of e-mail. A century ago, famous writers may have recorded their movements, discoveries and emotions to friends or family in letters which have often been preserved as part of our cultural heritage, helping to set literary works in the context of the writer's life and thought. E-mail storage is increasingly seen as a burden on a computer system. Will the memory of today's literary giants lose out to that of the computer?

And what about all the links an electronic publication might have to other websites? The exhilaration that grips us when we surf the Net quickly turns to



National libraries with the financial means have been steadily digitizing their collections.

© Peter Maltz/SIS, Paris

vertigo with the thought of preserving that sea of information.

National libraries are testing two different approaches. Given the extraordinary volume of web-based materials, Australian archivists are becoming "gatekeepers," sifting through and selecting the most important materials for a national electronic repository. To be part of the depot, an item must either be about the country or particularly relevant to its interests. Alternatively, it can be the work of an Australian, recognized as an authority on an issue of international significance. While this approach appears to be the most practical, there is a danger in becoming overly selective. After Napoleon ransacked the Vatican archives and sent them back to Paris in 1810, the French only saved the documents of immediate and apparent interest.

Alternatively, archivists might try to save the entire electronic domain of a country. Sweden has embarked on such an ambitious project, in collaboration with other Nordic states. Thanks in large part to a robot that takes regular "snapshots" of the Internet, the Swedes have already amassed more than 58,000 items—from online publications to conference proceedings—in building a central electronic repository.

Both of these routes lead to two major obstacles: copyright conflicts and costs. In some countries, publishers must deposit copies of every new publication in national libraries. These laws, however, do not always apply in the electronic domain. While some publishers voluntarily deposit copies of "handheld" works, like CD-ROMs, ephemeral works like electronic journals are practically untouchable for legal reasons. By subscribing to those journals, libraries or individuals aren't actually buying a "copy," just a license to access the material.

Taking a digital refresher

Do they have the right to offer that access to the public? And what if a library stops a subscription? Then they don't necessarily have the right to display or offer public access to back issues for which they paid.

Enormous financial pressure is building on national libraries and publishers alike to iron out new business arrangements and partnerships. Publishers are leery of the responsibility for preservation, yet at the same time cannot afford to see their collections become obsolete. Meanwhile, the archivists are finding it far more expensive to acquire an electronic publication than a traditional one. The National Library of Australia, for example, estimates that it takes one person a full working day to acquire the first version of an online publication—a task five times more labour intensive than adding a print item. A study by the British Library suggested that the cost of managing and preserving a digital publication over a 25-year-period is about 20 times greater than it is for print.

A hefty chunk of the costs go to "refreshing" digital documents. Every five or ten years, electronic collections are supposed to embark on a "migration," in archival lingo, to an updated computer configuration. Unfortunately, the journey is not without its casualties. Formats and presentations may change and some sections risk disappearing altogether. Does it matter if the look and "feel" of a website changes, so long as the contents remain?

For some archivists, migration is just a standby for "emulation," which would involve a combination of software and hardware capable of mimicking the behaviour of obsolete platforms and operating systems. In short, the aim is to develop a kind of mini-archive to "remind" computers of their past. But the technological wizards can only forge part of the key to preserving our digital documents. Ultimately, we must reconfigure relations between libraries and publishers. ■

Tuenjai Deetés:

a bridge to the hill tribes

Tuenjai Deetes, left, in a hill tribe village in northern Thailand.

© White House Photo/Washington

With an iron will and a calm spirit, the activist continues her 25-year struggle with the hill tribes of Thailand for cultural and environmental preservation

At a time when many Thai people viewed the hill tribes[1] in the north of the country as a security risk, you started working with them. Why?

In the early 70s, I was a university student in Bangkok where I heard all kinds of stories about the hill tribes, many of whom had fled from ethnic conflicts and hardships in neighbouring Burma, Laos, China and Cambodia. The hill tribes were accused of drug trafficking, prostitution and destroying forests with their slash and burn cultivation methods. I decided to see for myself through a student volunteer programme to teach the Thai language in the hills. It didn't take long to see that there was very little truth in those allegations.

I first went to stay with the Lizu people in Chiang Rai province. Here was this city-girl, born in Bangkok, who had never before climbed mountains, stumbling along trails for four hours. I'll never forget how refreshing it was to find the village and its tidy winding paths sheltered by an enormous forest. Despite all of the negative things that I heard, to my great surprise, I found the hill tribes living in a pure environment leading a simple traditional life. I couldn't understand their language yet I could feel the

people—they were so pure in heart. Their spirit inspired me. I wanted to understand their philosophy, their way of life in harmony with nature. I was enchanted by the songs and folklore through which the elders passed on their knowledge and wisdom to the young.

The headman of the first village I visited was like a father to me. He invited me to stay, and even offered to build me a hut, in exchange for teaching the children and adults the Thai language. Even though the Lizu and many other groups have lived in Thai territory for generations, very few spoke the language. They were so far removed, geographically and culturally, from the mainstream. We made an agreement. Until they could speak for themselves, I would serve as an intermediary, a bridge between the hill tribes, the Thai government and wider society.

© Barry Lewis/Network/Rapho, Paris

Near the Myanmar frontier, Akhas slash and burn the land before planting crops.

What kind of problems were the hill tribes facing?

At that time, nearly half of the hill tribes didn't even have Thai citizenship. As a result, they didn't have any legal rights to the land they had been cultivating for years. The increasing demand for forestland was pitting them against Thai authorities who were declaring a growing number of forest regions as nature reserves in order to protect the environment.

There were no roads, schools, hospitals or public services in the hill regions. The illiteracy rate was about 90 per cent and the birth rate in the highlands was almost three times higher than that of the lowlands. Infant mortality was almost double. In short, they were the most disadvantaged among the disadvantaged in the country. And yet, even though they were deprived of basic amenities, the hill tribes never thought that they were underprivileged because nature provided for all their needs, including medicine.

Weren't there accusations that the hill tribes were involved in opium cultivation?

For generations, tribes like the Lizu, the Hmong and others grew opium as part of their cultural tradition. Elders would sometimes smoke during family or community gatherings. It was also used for a variety of traditional medicines. These people rely on their own resources. But I can assure you that a hill tribe never got rich by growing opium for outsiders.

However, the situation changed when increasing Western demand for opium (to produce heroin) triggered illegal trafficking of the drug from the so-called Golden Triangle, the area bordering Thailand, Burma and Laos.

Individuals and groups with vested interests exploited the geographic advantage of the region for opium production. But the blame fell on the hill tribes, leading the United Nations and the Thai government to massively introduce the cultivation of cash crops like fruits and vegetables. These projects have had little success in improving the life and dignity of the hill tribes and have taken a heavy toll on the environment.

The Hmong tribe, for example, have been among the worst affected. To grow vegetables, they diverted more and more water from the rivers and began using fertilizers to increase their yields. By reducing and polluting rivers, they came into conflict with the Thai farmers living in the lowlands.

Wasn't this also linked to the problem of deforestation? Weren't the hill tribes accused of causing great damage by clearing forest for farming and then burning the fields after a harvest to rejuvenate the soil?

Traditionally, the hill tribes used slash and burn tactics in a limited way—just to produce food for their families. But in trying to produce cash crops and satisfy the demands of the market, the tribes surpassed the natural capacities of the land, degraded by deforestation and erosion. The Akha tribes, for example, began cultivating rice in steep areas, which caused soil erosion. They are now trying alternative methods.

However, I do not think that slash and burn cultivation alone caused the deforestation in the northern region. Timber companies and other commercial groups from the south should be held responsible for the large-scale problem. I do not deny that a country like Thailand needs more timber and other natural resources for its economic development. But at what cost? Today, no one appears willing to publicly discuss this problem.

You started out as a 'spokesperson' for the hill tribes. How has your role changed?

By studying their language, history and kinship system, I gained their confidence. This enabled me to introduce some basic education projects which later led to the creation of the Hill Area Development Foundation (HADF, see box). Since then, with the help of donor agencies, and the Thai government we were able to establish schools for children as well adults in the hill regions.

The general aim is to offer access to the formal education system. However, we also try to instil the children with a deep sense of pride in their history and culture, so that they won't blindly assimilate the ways of mainstream society but change in a positive way, based on their culture. For example, we very carefully developed a new syllabus integrating the knowledge of the ethnic tribes with that of the Thai curriculum for the HADF-run schools.

We also concentrate on offering training in sustainable agricultural methods so that hill tribe farmers can ▶

1. *According to the Hill Area Development Foundation, approximately one million hill tribe people live in Thailand's mountainous northern and western border regions. About 65 per cent of the hill population belong to two major ethnic groups–the Karen and Hmong tribes. Other tribes like the Lahu, Akha, Mien, H'tin, Lizu, Lawa and Khamu make up the rest of the population.*

"a life in the hills"

abandon slash and burn tactics. The new techniques, apart from preventing soil erosion, revitalizes the land.

The environmental groups were right to highlight the problem of deforestation. However, instead of offering alternatives, the government just began evicting the tribes from forest areas. Our aim isn't simply to introduce new or foreign techniques but to adapt and revitalize traditional agricultural practices. For example, the Karen tribes continue to follow an age-old rotation system. Instead of clearing land entirely, they simply cut the branches from the bottom of trees. They then rotate between swathes of land to grow a single crop, which gives the soil a chance to rejuvenate.

This kind of training project seems to be part of a larger struggle to strike a balance between various groups depending on the same limited resources. Can you describe the ongoing conflict between the hill tribes living in the region's watershed area and those in the lowlands?

In tropical countries like Thailand, we depend on a delicate natural process whereby forests absorb rainwater and release it into the rivers. If you reduce the forest, the rain just runs off the land and is wasted instead of flowing into the rivers. So we must take immediate steps to preserve the remaining forestland in the watershed area. Apart from being the main sources of water, the watershed area is also very supportive of many ecosystems.

Unfortunately, only the hill tribes living in the watershed region are expected to preserve the forest while those living downstream in the lowlands and cities are not showing any signs of changing their ways. In fact, they use more water than people living in the upstream areas. It is totally unfair on the part of the authorities to impose restrictions on the hill tribes and force them to relocate far away from their region in an effort to save forests.

How can we expect the hill tribes alone to make all the sacrifices? Preserving the environment is the duty of everyone and if we do not want the hill tribes to use the forest, we have to provide them with alternatives. That's why I insist on a harmonious relationship between the two sides.

In recent years, the Thai government has been investing in development projects for the northern region. What are the results so far?

There are more roads, electricity and other basic infrastructure in the hills now. But far less has been invested in education or environmental projects because politicians derive few benefits from them. When companies bid for a contract to build a new road, for example, a commission is usually given to the politician involved.

As a result of the construction projects, there is increasing contact between the hill tribes and lowland Thais which has led to a new set of problems. The insular life of the hills made it easier to create a shared vision of life in harmony with nature. Now the hill tribes must deal with the symbols of materialism. In a way, they face the same problems as many developing countries.

Greater exposure to advertising creates more greed. Young people in particular want to wear blue jeans, drive a motorcycle or a car, just like city people. They no longer want to work the land but simply make money. So many are migrating to big cities, which creates a lot of social tension. In the cities, they often get involved in prostitution, for example, and then return to the hills carrying diseases like AIDS.

Little by little, cultural identity is eroded by materialism. If this continues, I am afraid that the culture of the hill tribes could be lost forever. So we—the hill tribes, NGOs and government—must find ways of improving living conditions and assuring the people similar rights to lowlanders while retaining their specific cultural identity.

You mention the need for land rights, yet many of these people don't even have a Thai passport. Why is citizenship such a problem?

Due to political and economic reasons many hill tribes from neighbouring countries have been migrating to Thailand for centuries. You must understand that indigenous people in general don't feel bound by national borders. To begin with, they are often forced to move because of political conflicts and environmental needs.

Up until 1992, it was relatively easy to obtain some kind of identity papers if you were born in Thailand. But the government changed the laws, after large-scale migration into the area for both political and economic reasons. According to new rules, applicants should prove that they and their parents were born in Thailand. But few of these people possess birth certificates. We must also consider the plight of those not born in the country. How can we send people back to Burma where there is no justice?

It is very complicated. The Thai government cannot grant citizenship to everyone and is doing its best under the present circumstances. The cross-border migration also brings friction within the tribal communities. For example, Hmong ethnic tribes in Thailand are finding it difficult to secure enough forest for their own families. So when ethnic conflict began driving Hmong tribes from Laos across the border, the Thai Hmong association told them that they should go back to their country once the situation stabilizes.

The hill tribes of Thailand are a major tourist attraction. Have they profited from this?

Eco-tourism and cultural tourism should improve understanding between people from different parts of the world. On the contrary, the travel industry is exploiting the hill tribes in Thailand without even realizing it. While the government earns revenue by promoting tourism in the north, hardly any of the money is invested back in the region. Only the tour operators and a few middlemen profit.

The tourists tend to treat the indigenous people as some kind of exotic specimen. Instead of coming to the hills to take photos, they should learn to respect the local people and their culture. In northern Thailand, boats carrying foreign tourists often stop at Lahu and Karen villages along the Mekong River. Whenever a boat arrives, children start running in hope that the tourists will throw them

chocolates or money. Some foreigners also come to the hills looking for sex tourism. The international community should take serious steps to ban this.

What is it like to work in Thailand for an NGO championing the cause of indigenous peoples? What contacts do you have with other NGOs abroad and what are the issues involved?

Many people are questioning non-governmental organizations in general. They are often regarded as being in perpetual opposition to the government. Some groups and newspapers in Thailand accuse the NGOs of selling the country's misery abroad in order to get foreign funding. In a country like Thailand, I think the main role of the NGO should be to offer a voice to the disadvantaged. By offering a different viewpoint, we can offer alternative perspectives on our society. I am certain that most NGO workers realize that they alone cannot achieve the mission.

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An Akha woman shops in Chiang Rai.

They need co-operation from other parts of the society.

I have learned a lot from working with indigenous groups internationally, particularly through the Rainforest Action Network. From Malaysia to the Philippines and even Nigeria, the struggle is in many ways the same. People need the rights to their lands and resources—the right to earn a living with nature. They need protection from the multinationals, which plunder areas for resources like timber, oil and minerals.

In the name of research, companies make millions by patenting the traditional knowledge and medicines of indigenous peoples. Now the tribes themselves are being used for genetic research. In return, the tribes get nothing. In Thailand, we have had some well-known cases of exploitation of tribal medicines by Western companies. But due to legal complications we could not do anything about the abuse.

We must also question government policies for managing resources. For example, countries often declare forest regions as protected areas, ignoring the rights of indigenous peoples who have been living there for hundreds of years. Up until recently, the major environmental campaigns and treaties did not look into the problems of the indigenous people. In the early 1990s, the United Nations declared the International Decade for the World's Indigenous Peoples (1995-2004), yet so far, it has not been successful. Only a few countries have taken concrete steps to recognize their rights.

The positive side, however, is that groups internationally are co-ordinating their efforts and learning from others' experience. But the time has come to sit down with bodies like the World Trade Organization and the World Bank to frankly discuss the world's future. ■

INTERVIEW BY ETHIRAJAN ANBARASAN

UNESCO COURIER JOURNALIST

A LIFE IN THE HILLS

In 1973, university students in Thailand staged mass demonstrations calling for democracy and an end to the country's military dictatorship. In response, authorities closely monitored all student activities inside the country. Tuenjai Deetes' work as a student volunteer teacher in the hill village of Baan Pangsa in northern Thailand was no exception. Undeterred by intimidation and surveillance, Deetes pursued her mission with determination.

In 1976 Deetes found herself in a similar situation following a left-wing inspired student revolt in the country, which was brutally repressed after the military staged a coup in October of that year. When authorities came knocking on her door, she recalls telling them: "I believe in peace and non-violence and wish to continue with my work for the hill tribes." Though initially dubious, officials allowed her to pursue her work and Deetes went on to win government support for her projects soon after. On the other hand, she was always cautious not to take sides in ethnic conflicts or to confront directly the drug lords in the sensitive border region. "We had to operate with extreme care and tact without offending anyone."

Deetes founded the Hill Area Development Foundation (HADF) in 1986 to assist hill tribes in dealing with problems ranging from environmental management to social development. Today, the HADF works in 27 hill villages in the watershed area of the Mae Chan and Mae Salong rivers on the Thai-Burmese border.

Slightly built, the 48-year-old Deetes travels indefatigably from one hill village to another. It requires extraordinary courage and conviction for a Bangkok-born-and-raised girl to give up the comforts of the big city for the remote hill regions. Over the years, Deetes has won enormous respect and admiration from her peers, who recently elected her as a senator after she stood as an independent candidate in Chiang Rai, the capital of the mountainous province in northern Thailand where she works.

Deetes' dedicated and selfless service has won her many laurels, including the 1994 Goldman Environmental Prize, given annually to grassroots environmental activists. During the 25th anniversary of the United Nations Environment Programme in 1997, she was named as one of "25 Women Leaders in Action" for her role in protecting the planet.

Despite her achievements, Deetes remains modest and down to earth. In the coming years she wants to train more volunteers to work with the hill tribes and create a network of organizations in the region. "I cannot change the governments of the world on my own. With small groups, we can change the world and steer it in a positive direction," says the soft-spoken Deetes. Married with two children, she now lives in Chiang Rai. ■

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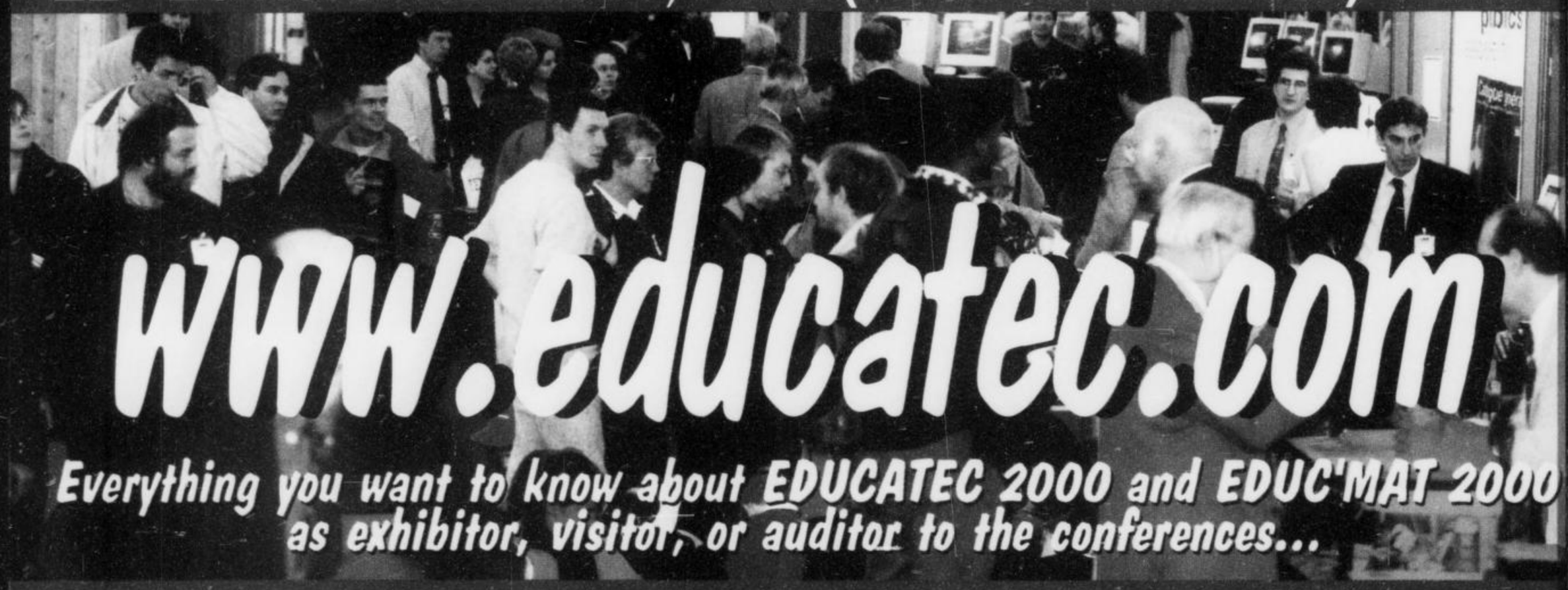

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